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By Elliott Flower

AUTHOR OF "POLICEMAN FLYNN," ETC.

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FOREWORD

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WHILE many of the incidents related in the following pages are true, no attempt has been made to depict exact conditions in any particular locality. The wards mentioned were chosen at random, without any intention of giving the impression that they are either especially noteworthy or notorious. In a word, although the scene is located in Chicago, the "Eighth" and "Twenty-fourth" are fictional wards, used to demonstrate conditions that do exist in some wards in nearly all large cities. The political methods employed, however, are, in most instances, taken from the actual experiences of men who have served the public in one capacity or another, and the stories told of some of the characters are literally true.

The author begs to acknowledge the courtesy of some men "on the inside," who have given him specific instances, in addition to general information, of "the devious ways of politics." He has excellent reason to believe, however, that they would not care to be more particularly identified, even for the purpose of receiving his formal thanks. E. F.

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THE SPOILSMEN

CHAPTER I.

SOME CAMPAIGN PRELIMINARIES

"WHAT the Old Man says goes!"

Billy Ryan banged his fist on the table with such force that Bartender Jim Casey, in the outer room, took his cigar from his mouth, and, pointing with it, remarked casually to the only customer at the bar, "They're makin' histh'ry in there."

"Are they?" asked the customer, disinterestedly.

"Sure they are," answered Casey. "They're makin' th' same kind iv histh'ry that th' flim-flam man makes, an' 'tis th' likes iv you that'll have to pay f'r th' makin' iv it."

"Why will we have to pay for the making of it?" demanded the customer, idly.

"Because ye don't obey th' r-rules," replied Casey.

"What rules?"

"Th' r-rules iv iv'ry large city."

"What are they?"

"There's only wan," explained Casey, "an' 'tis this: Keep ye-er eye on th' politicians an' ye-er hand on ye-er pockitbook."

"Jim," laughed the customer, as he disposed of his drink and started for the door, "you have a sharp tongue."

"'Tis only a sharp wan," Jim called after him, "that can cut to th' hear-rt iv things."

Jim Casey was a character worth studying. It was the truth underlying his wit that made it effective, but he never was malevolent. His "flings," though sharp, were given in a good-natured way, and nothing more serious than a laugh ever came of them. Furthermore, his wit was reserved for those whom he knew and who knew him and his ways. While giving the impression of speaking freely, he really guarded the secrets of his regular customers with care, and some of them had secrets that needed guarding — political secrets. He knew of these only in a general way, for he was in no sense a politician; but he knew enough to make trouble occasionally, had he so desired. As to details, he preferred to remain in ignorance. "What ye don't know ye can't tell," was his motto, and he lived up to it so faithfully that, when serving drinks in the back room, it was not unusual for him to

remark, "Ye'd bettther wait till I'm back iv th' bar before continoooin' ye-er talk." Nevertheless, he was naturally well posted on local politics, and the subject was one he liked to discuss — with the right people.

On this particular evening, there being none of "the right people" present, except those in conference in the back room, Casey settled himself comfortably on the top of a small ice-chest near the head of the bar, and waited for something to happen.

In the back room, Billy Ryan, having given sufficient emphasis to his remarks by banging his fist on the table, proceeded in a calmer tone to give reasons and details.

"The Old Man," he said, "has his reasons, and you can lay dollars to matches they're good ones. He wants a victory in the Twenty-fourth, and to get it we'll have to have a man who'll draw from the Republicans and also pull down the indorsement of the Citizens' Safety League. Darnell can do that."

"Darnell!" commented State Senator Tom Pepper, scornfully. "Harold Darnell! How will that sound on the Democratic ticket? Good Lord! why don't you make it Percy DeVere or Willy Tidliwinks, or something else that's real sweet?"

"I suppose he's 'easy,'" commented Alderman Jerry Bayler.

"Most likely," returned Ryan, "but that isn't the

point. We want the ward; we never have had it, and it will do us good to get it once."

"What's the use of the ward, if we don't control the man?" asked Bayler. "Why, this fellow has money to throw to the birds! He may be 'easy' for campaign expenses that the Old Man can salt away when no one is looking, but how the devil are you going to 'reach' him when there's something doing? That's what I want to know. If you can't do that, he'd be just as much use to us in the lake as in the Council."

"You talk like a child!" retorted Ryan, warmly. "You can't see as far as a woman can throw with her left hand. Now, listen to a bit of reason: We can't elect the kind of a man you want from that ward, no matter how hard we try. If we put him up, he'll be beaten — any Democrat will be beaten that can't pull pretty near the whole silk-stockings vote, Democrat and Republican. It isn't our ward any way you put it. In national politics it's Republican, and in city politics it's Reform, with a big R. You know mighty well that, if you could put a 'gang' Republican through in that ward, you'd dump the party and do it. But you can't. It isn't in the cards to do it. Well, then, why not get the credit of putting up a good man—a real, fine Reform man? There's nothing to lose, and it helps the party. It's better than having a Reform Republican

to buck against, isn't it? Maybe you can do something with this fellow, and maybe you can't, but it's something to have him on the ticket, and it's something more to carry the ward. The thing to do is to put up the 'useful' lads where you can elect them, and where you can't you might as well get the credit for doing the right thing. The papers are yelling now about the convention being in the hands of the 'gang' and that only 'gang' men can get through. Well, we'll fool 'em. We'll put this fellow up, and we'll make a hot fight for him, just as if his election was the whole thing. That's the kind of a play that's going to do us a lot of good."

"That's right," broke in Senator Pepper. "I'm wise to the scheme now. If the 'gang' and the local 'machine' stand for such a candidate as that, why they're not half as bad as they're made out to be. It's a bluff, and a good one. We've done it before, but not just on this scale."

"Now you're talking sense," asserted Ryan. "We've put up fine figureheads where they couldn't be elected, just to make a showing, and now we're putting up one that's strong enough to get through, if we make the right kind of a fight for him."

"But will the boys stand for him?" asked Pepper.

"When were you born?" demanded Ryan, sarcastically. "Do you think we're running primaries on the lottery plan? The boys will stand for any-

thing the Old Man says, just as you will. If you don't, you know what kind of a political future you've got."

"Well," put in Alderman Bayler, resignedly, "I suppose it's all right, but don't ask me to speak for him. My 'constits' would have a fit, if they thought I'd been cavorting with Harold Darnell."

"Oh, we'll have you spouting for him and for Joe Mason, too, before the campaign is over," retorted Ryan.

"Who's Joe Mason?" asked Bayler.

"Joe Mason," returned Ryan, impressively, "is the next alderman from the Eighth." *

For a moment Pepper and Bayler were too astonished for words.

"From the Eighth!" repeated Pepper, finally.

"That's what I said."

"What's the matter with Baxter?" demanded Bayler. "We need him."

"Yes," answered Ryan, "you always have needed him, and you've used him so much that he's no good. Even the Eighth will hardly stand for him another term. There's going to be a hot fight in that ward this year. The Republicans will put up O'Hara, and he'll be indorsed by the Citizens' Safety League. That alone wouldn't cut much figure, but he's strong with the people. You know how they are out there. They don't care what a man does so long as he's

good to them, and O'Hara has been mighty good to them. So has Baxter, but O'Hara can cut into Baxter's vote in the poor precincts, and Baxter can't do a thing in the others. He'll be weaker there than he ever was before. And some of the scandals have hurt him, too, in precincts where you'd least expect it. One of your cold-blooded prominent citizens couldn't get a vote in twenty from Baxter, but O'Hara can. He's one of the people. They know him and he knows them, and we can't control him."

"Can we control Mason?" asked Bayler.

"He's young," replied Ryan, "and it's the chance of a lifetime for him. He's the kind of a fellow that the Old Man can push along, if he's 'right' with us. All we ask is that he shall be 'right' when we need him, and lots of better men have done more to make sure of their political future. Of course, the Old Man isn't interested in all your Council schemes, but there are some things that he wants, and Mason will be pledged before he's allowed to run."

Bayler looked thoughtful and troubled. So did Pepper.

"He may be 'right' for the Old Man, and not 'right' for us," suggested Bayler. "It's the game of politics that the Old Man is playing — with a 'rake-off,' of course."

"While you're playing the game of boodle only," retorted Ryan, with brutal frankness. "But don't

worry! The Old Man has to look out a little for your game in order to play his. He needs you."

"The Eighth," remarked Pepper, "is in my district, and Baxter was a mighty handy man. I don't like to see him turned down."

"He'll be taken care of in some other way when the time comes," said Ryan, "and just now you'd better keep your hands off."

"He's my friend," urged Pepper.

"In politics," asserted Ryan, "there's no friendship but the friendship of necessity or convenience."

"And I don't know about this Mason, either," persisted Pepper.

"If the Old Man does, that's enough," said Ryan, decisively. "You stick to the Old Man, or you'll have to work for a living."

Senator Pepper laughed, but his laugh lacked heartiness. Then he rang the bell for Casey, and Casey came with the drinks. He didn't have to ask what they would have; he knew.

"There's a r-rumour," commented Casey, casually, "that ye're goin' to r-run a dood f'r alldherman in th' Twinty-foorth. A lad was in here a bit ago tellin' about it, an' I give him th' laugh."

"Well, you were wrong, Jim," returned Ryan, with a smile. "Unless something happens you'll see Harold Darnell on the Democratic ticket."

"Har'ld Darnill!" repeated Casey, reflectively.

"How'll it luk alongside iv Mickey Hogan? An' they say he plays golluf."

"I believe he does."

"An' pushes wan iv thim autymobils."

"That's right."

Casey shook his head dismally.

"How about tinnis?" he asked. "Does he play this game iv long-tinnis, where they say, 'Oh, pshaw!' an' 'Dear me!' whin they miss a shtroke with th' openwor-rk shingle?"

"Perhaps. I don't know about that."

"Think iv it!" commented Casey, lugubriously. "Think iv th' gr-reat Dimmycrathic party going into a campaign on th' platform iv long-tinnis an' pink tea! Like as not ye'll be servin' limonade on th' levee."

"Hardly that," laughed Ryan.

"Ye think so," returned Casey, "but ye can't tell where ye'll land whin ye shtart goin' down-hill."

Before the laugh that greeted this had died away, there was an interruption, occasioned by the sudden appearance of a young man in the entrance to the back room. He took in the party at a glance, and then addressed himself to Ryan.

"The Old Man wants to see you," he said.

"Anything wrong?" asked Ryan, as he rose to go.

"He wants to talk over the situation in the

Twenty-fourth with you," was the reply. "Darnell positively refuses to run."

"Thank Hiven f'r that!" ejaculated Casey.
"'Twill not worry me so to vote th' tickit now."

CHAPTER II.

A CANDIDATE'S DOUBTS

JOSEPH MASON sat at a window of his modest little home, smoking. His wife sat near him, sewing, and in front of the house their two children played.

Mason lived in the better part of the ward, but he was a citizen of the whole of it. As a general thing a man merely lives in a ward, his work and interests lying elsewhere. He comes to the ward at night and leaves it in the morning. He knows the people of his immediate neighbourhood, but he does not know the ward, although he may think he does. If he happens to be a candidate for office some day, he learns of his mistake, especially if he is put forward in a Reform movement. In this frequently lies the trouble with Reform movements. A man is put forward because of his high standing in the business world, but the majority of the people in some wards know little of the business world, and care less. Their interests are bound up in the ward. They are not electing aldermen to represent anything else,

and a man's reputation elsewhere is a matter of no moment. His standing in the commercial district of the city is no more to them than his standing in London or Paris. It is what he is to the ward that counts. Prominent citizens, of sterling integrity, who have been induced to run for office to help redeem a city, have occasionally found this out when the votes were counted. But Joe Mason was a ward man in a ward where this meant a good deal. He was a resident of the ward and a merchant of the ward, being sole proprietor of a modest hardware store, located just at the edge of what was known as "the poor end." There was no "rich end," but there was a district in the ward where the people were fairly well-to-do. Here it was that Mason lived, although a good deal of his business was transacted with the less fortunate. Thus he was fairly well known to all classes, and to know him was to like him. Rather stockily built, with black hair, black eyes, and a dark moustache, he might easily have been forbidding had it not been for his smile. He had a smile that invited confidence and promised sympathy. There was a depth of good-natured sincerity in it that is not often found. No trace of craft or sarcasm lurked there, and his actions showed that the smile was the true index of his character.

"I have a chance fer a job," said a man who slouched into his store one day.

"Why don't you take it?" asked Mason.

"The job," explained the man, "is fer me an' a shovel."

"And you haven't the shovel," said Mason, quickly grasping the situation.

"Nor the money," added the man.

"Well," returned Mason, thoughtfully, "I'll let you have the shovel on credit, if you'll promise not to take a drink until you've paid for it."

That sounds like the proposition of a practical reformer, but Mason would have scouted such a suggestion. He had no expectation of reforming the man and no certainty of being paid for the shovel, but, from a business point of view, it was wise to exact that promise. It lessened the likelihood of losing the money.

How much money Mason lost in helping men that way only his books could tell, but it was a well-known fact that any workman who lacked the tools of his trade could get credit for anything in reason by telling the young hardware man a plausible story. On one occasion he set a carpenter up in business, and in doing that he took a considerable risk. The man had been employed in a shop, but was out of work and desperate. Mason heard about him, talked with him, was impressed with his honesty, helped him to find a location that promised well, and then actually set him up in business in a small way. In

this instance he lost nothing by it, either, for the man paid back every cent, although he was a long time doing it.

“When a man wants to go to work and lacks the tools,” he explained, later, “why, if there’s any humanity in you at all, you’ve just got to take chances with him. He’s the kind of a man who ought to be helped. Of course,” he admitted, regretfully, “a fellow makes mistakes now and then in judging men, and sometimes I’ve found my tools in a pawnshop. But all merchants get bad debts on their hands occasionally, and the big fellows over town get stuck for dollars where I do for cents. We’ve all got to run risks, and, whenever I think a man really wants to earn a living, I’ll take the risk. I couldn’t sleep nights if I didn’t.”

It will be seen from this that there was reason for Mason’s popularity in the ward. Where he lived he was liked and respected as an energetic and honest young man of unfailing good nature; where he carried on his business he commanded both respect and gratitude. With those who could and did pay promptly he was an unusually obliging tradesman; with those who could not and did not he was as lenient as the circumstances would permit, and he was in especial favour with the wives of men he had helped to put to work.

"He's a good man," they said; "he has a heart in him."

It naturally followed that Mason could draw heavily from any candidate for any office in the gift of the people of that ward, and, with proper backing, could win from any one. He knew this as well as the men who were planning to put him up, and yet, as he puffed away at his pipe while his wife sewed, he was troubled. The usual smile failed to illumine his face.

"Maggie," he said at last, "I don't know about this aldermanic business."

"I thought it was all settled," she returned, looking up from her work in surprise.

"Nothing is settled in politics until it's settled," he remarked, rather vaguely, "and you can't tell when that is until it's all over. Now, why do they want me to run?"

"Because you're the best man they could possibly get," she answered, simply.

He put down his pipe deliberately, went over to her chair, and kissed her.

"That's for the compliment," he laughed.

"You'll shock the neighbours," she protested.

"Not here," he answered. "In some parts of the city it may be a shocking thing for a man to kiss his own wife, but not here." Then, returning to his chair and becoming serious again, he went

on: "I don't like some things about this a bit. So far as Bob Howe and the machine are concerned, Baxter is all right. He's the kind of a man they want. They said they were going to drop him because they were satisfied they could not elect him this time, but why do they come to me? One would naturally think they would look up somebody in the same class."

"I thought it was because you were the only one who could beat O'Hara," she suggested.

"That's what they said," he admitted, "but they said some other things, too."

"What?" she asked.

"Well, that's rather hard to explain," he answered, evasively. "There was nothing direct, but there have been some veiled allusions and insinuations that I didn't exactly like. They've been too enthusiastic in telling me how much they can do for me and of the great political future that there is for the right man. It wasn't necessary. I'm willing to be alderman just for the salary."

"Yes," she said, wistfully, "I'd like to have that salary for the children. There's so much I want to do for them, so much that I've been planning in the hope that business would improve at the store. There isn't much margin over the household expenses now, and the salary would really be fifteen hundred dollars extra, wouldn't it?"

"Why, of course," he replied. "I'd get just as much out of the store as I do now, and the salary — well, you could have all of that."

"It would be such a help," she said. "Two years would be three thousand dollars that I could put away, and if you were reelected there would be three thousand dollars more. Just think what that would do for the children when they are a little older, and we want to give them the very best educational advantages and all that! We could live on the store —"

"We could live a good deal better on the store, if I didn't have to carry so many people on the books," he interrupted.

"Why do you do it?" she asked.

"Oh, I can't help it," he answered, "and you couldn't, either, in my place. If it would put a man with a family in the way of earning a living, you'd give him the whole store on credit; you know you would." He smiled affectionately at the slight little woman with the sewing-basket, and then went on: "Besides, it isn't such a bad investment, anyway, when you come to think of it, if it brings me the aldermanic job. It's just because I've done these things that I'm so strong in the ward, and it's because I'm so strong in the ward that Bell wants me." He paused again, and shook his head. "But why should Bell care? What object has he in view?"

If all that they say of him is true, he doesn't do anything without an object, especially in politics, and yet Bob Howe was emphatic in saying that I was Bell's choice. 'The Old Man,' said Howe — you know they call Bell the Old Man — 'the Old Man doesn't often interfere in ward matters that don't directly concern him, but in this case you are his personal choice. He thinks that you are the kind of a man it will pay to push, and if you treat him right, this will be only the beginning.'"

Mason stopped short, and for a few minutes smoked his pipe moodily.

"Well?" said Mrs. Mason, inquiringly.

"It's flattering and tempting," the young man explained, "and at first I thought of no more than that. I said I'd make the race. But I'm wise enough to know that a political boss of the Bell kind doesn't pass out favours without exacting a price. What is the price? That's what troubles me."

"They offered you the nomination," suggested the little woman.

"They said I could have it, if I wanted it," returned her husband, "and they painted a bright future for me."

"Nothing was said about price?"

"No-o."

"They asked for no pledges that you couldn't conscientiously give?"

"Not directly."

"Then what's the use of worrying?"

"Well," he answered, thoughtfully, "there's an underlying something there that I don't like. I can't explain it, but it's there. I feel as if they hadn't been exactly honest with me; that something is expected of me that hasn't been explained; that I'm being led into some kind of a net. Perhaps I'm dull; perhaps they've said enough to make the situation clear to most men; but it isn't to me, and I'm beginning to be afraid I'll find myself tied up in some awkward way."

"Foolish boy!" laughed his wife. "You've had to strive for everything worth having so far, and to have something come to you unsought makes you nervous. Now, I'll tell you what I think: They want you because they can't carry the ward without you, and they're not going to risk asking you to make promises that might change your determination to run. They want you on any terms they can get you, and you won't have a bit of trouble."

"You're prejudiced," he said, with a laugh.

"At any rate," she persisted, "they've asked for no pledges and you've made none. All you have to do is to remember that we need the fifteen hundred dollars a year, and — get it."

"Rather a mercenary way of looking at it," he commented. "Most candidates like to have you

think that they want office for the good that it will enable them to do."

"Well," she returned, "I can't see that the fact that the money would be most acceptable prevents you from doing good. I expect you to be the very best alderman in the Council, as a matter of course. If you're not, I'll be ashamed of you, and my mind is all made up to be proud. Who's coming?" she concluded, abruptly, as she saw the children in front of the house cease their play and race down the street.

Mason sauntered out on the porch to see, and his wife followed.

"About a dozen men and an Italian street band," he said. "I wonder what's up."

A moment later the delegation stopped in front of Mason's little home, and the street band gave an execrable rendition of some popular and patriotic airs.

"A serenade, by thunder!" cried Mason.

"Dot's right!" exclaimed a little German, who was now coming up the steps. "We shust heard der news, und we're mooch glad for ourselves und yourselves. You make a goot alderman, ain't it?"

"Hurrah for Mason!" yelled a man on the sidewalk, and a cheer was given. Then they all crowded up on the porch, and some of the neighbours joined them.

"You're beginning rather early, aren't you?" asked Mason. "Better wait until after the primaries at least."

"That's all right, Mason," put in one of the men. "We want you to know we're with you. You're the kind of a man we want. Go in and win!"

"Vin, sure!" added the little German. "You can't lose it. Don'd Bob Howe say so, und he knows. It's fixed already yet."

"Howe as much as said it was all settled," said another, "and so we wanted to congratulate you."

"So Howe put up this little game," mused Mason, as he shook hands all round. There was an awkward pause when this ceremony was finished, and then one of the men whispered in Mason's ear.

"Can't you do it?" asked Mason. "I'll give you the money, but I'm in my slippers."

"Don't be proud, Mason," the other returned, in a whisper. "It may do in some wards, but it won't pay in this."

Mason turned to his wife with a laugh.

"This is politics," he said.

Then, still in his slippers, he led the way to the nearest saloon.

CHAPTER III.

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

IF Joseph Mason needed any proof of his popularity in the ward, he received it the following day. When he reached the store his clerk informed him that three or four men from the lower end of the ward had stopped on their way to work to say that they were "with him."

"My work on the relief committee last winter," he commented, when the name of one was mentioned. "I remember getting medical attendance for his wife."

"The credit system," he laughed, a moment later, when he recognised another name. "That fellow still owes me a little something on his tools."

Then came men from the upper end of the ward — Herman Abt, a well-to-do German; Martin Appleby, who usually voted the Republican ticket, and others who were sufficiently prosperous to be interested in an honest Council.

"I guess I'm in for it," laughed Mason.

"There's no chance to back out now. They really seem to want me."

In truth, some of the expressions were exceptionally strong.

"Don't falter," was the advice of Martin Appleby. "We need you in this ward. O'Hara is a good man, but you're a better one, and it's doubtful if O'Hara could be elected, anyway. That's why I'm going to give you my vote, and I tell you, Mason, it's a duty you owe the ward to go in and win, now that you've got the chance. The only thing that surprises me is that the 'machine' is willing to let you run."

"Yes," said Mason, with just a trace of bewilderment in his frank smile, "that's what surprises me."

Another thing that surprised him was that now and then Bob Howe, the Democratic leader in that district, seemed to loom up dimly in the background. The first news had come from Howe, and several of the callers mentioned him. Two remarked incidentally that one of Howe's lieutenants had suggested the wisdom of convincing Mason of the ward's enthusiasm in his behalf. Howe seemed to be unusually industrious.

Finally, the man behind the scenes came on the stage himself. He walked into the store a little before noon, when there was a lull in both business and politics.

"The ward seems to take kindly to you, Mason," he said, extending his hand.

"Yes," returned Mason, "and I guess you're largely responsible for it."

"Not at all, not at all," protested Howe. "It's your own popularity. The ward wants you, and all I had to do was to say you were a candidate to send the people here in droves. I tell you, the Old Man mighty seldom makes a mistake. He picked you out, and I'm glad to say I indorsed his choice unhesitatingly. I know you better than he does, and I told him you could win hands down from O'Hara or anybody else. It's a great chance for you, Mason. The Old Man is looking for the right kind of people to push along, and, if you treat him right, you won't do a thing but keep on climbing."

"Now, see here!" exclaimed Mason, "I've heard that about treating him right until I have it on the brain. What do you mean by it? What's expected of me?"

Howe, a dumpy little man with a smooth face and a bald head, laughed pleasantly.

"Nothing much," he said. "A man is expected to know his friends in all the affairs of life, isn't he?"

"Of course."

"Well, that's all there is to it. A man naturally helps those who help him. It's just the same in

politics as anywhere else, only there are some people who don't seem to understand it. The Old Man doesn't ask much of any one, but he can't stand ingratitude."

"But how can I help him?" insisted Mason. "What does he expect me to do? I'm a green man in politics."

"Oh, there'll be no trouble about that," returned Howe. "We'll talk about it some other time in a less public place. I was just looking over the ward to see how they take your candidacy, and thought I'd drop in for a moment. It's a risky thing to put forward a new man in a ward like this, especially when he isn't in touch with the workers, and we have to watch things pretty closely."

Howe passed out, leaving Mason as doubtful and uncertain as before. Yet in one thought there was consolation: Something unexplained was expected of him, but the fact that they were going ahead without explanation seemed to indicate that it was not a matter of great importance or one concerning which they had any serious doubts, from which it was fair to infer that it was something he could do with perfect propriety. Surely, if they had any other kind of a proposal to make, they would not start a boom for him before making it. Thus he reasoned, and still the reasoning did not quite satisfy him. Nor did a call from Alderman Bayler add to

his peace of mind. Alderman Bayler was crafty and elusive. It was evident that there was something on his mind, but he made no direct statement and asked no direct questions. After introducing himself and explaining that he naturally wished to meet the man who was sure to be one of his colleagues, he led the conversation deftly to various members of the Council. He spoke particularly of those who were notoriously of the "gang," and seemed anxious to elicit some expression of opinion, but Mason was non-committal until it was suggested that Baxter had "done well."

"If he hadn't done so well in one way," asserted Mason, "there would be no occasion to side-track him now."

"Well," insinuated Bayler, "it takes a good deal of cash to keep this ward in line. So much is expected, and Baxter was certainly liberal with the poor."

"It is no credit to a man to be liberal with other people's money," retorted Mason, pointedly.

Bayler left in thoughtful mood, being far from satisfied with his interview. The "gang" had been weakened at a previous election, and could ill afford to lose another member.

"He may do," he muttered. "Of course they all talk that way before election, and we may get

him later, but he won't come easy. I'd rather have a man we're sure of — like Baxter."

As Mason walked home to dinner — for he dined at home in the middle of the day — he was quite as thoughtful as Bayler, and his wife's optimism had no appreciable effect upon him. It was natural that she should be optimistic, for she knew practically nothing of politics. She was a little blue-eyed woman, affectionate and trusting, whose mind gave little heed to anything except the welfare of her husband and the future of her children. In the present opportunity she saw a chance for him and future benefits for the children. If she gave more of thought to them than to him, it was because she was supremely confident of his ability and inclination to do exactly what was right in any and all circumstances. He would reflect credit on the ward and on himself, as a matter of course; his services would be of great public benefit; so why should she trouble her head about it? The children were her care. The trickery and treachery and snares of politics, of which she had only a hazy idea at best, would not affect him; he would be above all that, for he was an honest man. He would be successful, and the children — She always came back to the children, and then she dreamed dreams that would seem farcical to one who never has had to figure closely in order to live in ordinary comfort.

So Mrs. Mason was not one to whom her husband could appeal for advice at this time, for she did not understand. Her ideas of right and wrong were clearly defined, but the devious methods of practical politicians were quite beyond her comprehension. Still, as was his custom, he discussed everything with her, even though he gained little satisfaction.

"I've been sounded," he announced at dinner.

"Sounded?" she repeated.

"Yes; sounded by Bayler."

"The boodle man?"

"That's his reputation," he said, with a smile; "but we don't put it in so many words. He wanted to find out if I would be with the 'gang' in the Council."

"I hope you told him what you thought of him!" she exclaimed, hotly. That any one should even hint at such a thing in connection with her husband filled her with indignation.

"Why, the fact is," he returned, "I didn't realise what he was up to until it was all over and I got to thinking about it afterward. But I don't believe he got any satisfaction out of me. And Bob Howe was in the store, too," he added. "I didn't like the way he talked. There's something back of it all, and I've half a mind to drop out. I'm afraid I'm too slow-witted for politics; I don't seem to understand the hints that are thrown at me."

"Never mind the hints," she advised. "Just be straightforward, as you always are, and you won't have a bit of trouble. Then they'll have to be straightforward with you."

"That's true enough," he answered. "They'll have to speak out plainly after awhile, but every minute that passes makes it harder for me to withdraw my name, and — I don't know, I don't know." Then, after a pause: "Maggie, would you be very much disappointed if I drew out?" That she would was plainly evident from her face.

"Well, never mind," he said, hastily. "I'm just as anxious as you are not to miss this chance, and I'll stick to it. Perhaps I'll get the thing straightened out when I go to see Senator Pepper this afternoon. He sent for me to come to his office."

"Oh, I'm sure you will!" she exclaimed, brightening. "You'll find it's all right, I know, just as soon as you have a talk with the right people."

"That sounds suggestive," he returned, with a laugh. "I've heard too much about being right with the right people and doing the right thing, in the last day or so."

Senator Pepper was less shifty than Alderman Bayler, but that was because his proposition would better stand the light of day. It was not necessary that he should be so circumspect.

"Of course, you understand, Mason," said the

State Senator, "that your ward is in my district, and that I can do you some good there. Now, Baxter and I were of use to each other, and, if he hadn't been so careless in some of his deals, the ward would be willing to stand for him yet. He took care of some of my people, and I took care of some of his. There are a few on the city pay-roll now that I'd hate to have disturbed." He paused, but Mason said nothing. "Of course," he went on, "if you'll see that they're not bothered, I'll be ready to return the favour in any way that I can."

"How about the Civil Service?" asked Mason.

"Damned nuisance!" exclaimed the Senator, "but not so bad as it might be. It doesn't cover everything, and now and then there are ways of beating it. But never mind that now. We can take up details later. I size you up as a man who wants to keep his hands clean, and that's all right, but politics is a game of give and take for those who are in it. I can help you a lot."

"I don't doubt it," said Mason.

"And I can hurt you some, too."

"Very likely."

"I'll be up for reelection before the end of your term in the Council," continued the Senator, leaning over his desk earnestly. "Now, as man to man, are you with me or not? Are you going to take care of

my people and put in some good licks for me, if I do as much for you now?"

Mason's smile, so familiar to the people of his ward, was having a hard time in politics. It had been driven from his face on several occasions. It disappeared now.

"Senator," he said, "I am not in a position to make pledges, for I don't know where they might lead me. I am new to this business — so new that I didn't suppose running for alderman would tangle me up in State politics. All I know of you is what I have heard, and that has not been always to your credit." The Senator winced at this, but kept his temper. "You may be the best man for the place, and you may not. I don't know, and I won't make any pledges until I do know."

"Better think it over, Mason," urged the Senator. "A man can't stand by himself in politics; he needs support of the right kind. My record is good."

"I hope so," returned Mason, grimly.

"Alliances of this sort are the price of success," persisted the Senator.

"Then I won't pay the price," retorted Mason.

"You're too young and new to the game to be pig-headed," argued the Senator.

"Senator," said the young man, "you've come at me with the first out-and-out proposition I've had, and perhaps I ought to thank you for that. There

have been hints and insinuations, but nothing tangible until now, and now I want to say that I won't make any blind pledges to or for any one. I intend to know what I'm doing and to act on my very best judgment."

"You ought to save that for use in your campaign speeches," suggested the Senator, with just a trace of sarcasm in his tone. Then he added: "Have you had a talk with the Old Man yet?"

"No."

"Well, when you have seen him," said the Senator, significantly, "if you're still in the race, come back and see me. Perhaps you will be better satisfied with my record then."

"And if I don't come?" queried Mason.

"If you don't come," answered the Senator, "you'd better make your plans to devote your whole time to the hardware business. The Old Man and his schemes can go to the devil! I intend to have something to say about this ward."

CHAPTER IV.

A GLIMPSE OF PRACTICAL POLITICS

"BAD, bad, bad!" commented Billy Ryan, when he heard of the interview between Mason and Senator Pepper.

Ryan had called to see Mason, and the two were alone in the little parlour, Mrs. Mason being upstairs with the children.

"Why?" demanded Mason. "Pepper wanted me to use my influence to retain his men on the city pay-roll, regardless of their fitness, and he demanded the promise of my support for himself. I don't know anything about his men, and what I know of him is not particularly to his credit. Am I to tie myself up on every proposition before I even get the nomination? Is my course to be settled for me in advance?"

Ryan was hardly prepared for this, but he laughed it off.

"You'll understand better when you've learned to handle the ropes," he said. "It's sometimes necessary in politics to do some things you don't

want to do in order to be able to do some other things that you really ought to do. That's where the reformer makes his mistake. He wants to do everything his own way, and he loses the chance of doing anything at all in most cases. 'The greatest good for the greatest number,' is the motto. You've a great chance in this ward, and there's no use throwing it away, just to show that you don't approve of Pepper. That isn't practical. It won't do you or anybody else any good. It won't help the ward, and it will hurt you."

This sounded plausible, and it cannot be denied that Mason was willing to be convinced. He had worried a good deal over his interview with Senator Pepper, for he wanted to be nominated and elected.

"You've got to make some sacrifices for the people of your ward," Ryan went on, "and you might even say for the city. You can do them more good in the Council than you can here, can't you? Well, then, your business is to get elected. If you have to wink at a little something now and then, it's all in a good cause, and there's something good coming out of it. That's the way to look at the thing. Now, if you can get a chance to do a good thing for yourself, and for a whole lot of other people, just by being a bit blind to Pepper's graft, you'd better do it. Of course, he worked for the Allen bill, but what's that to you? Because

he did one or two bad things, is no reason why you shouldn't put him in the way of doing a good one, like electing you to the Council. You'd better go back and tell him you're with him."

"I'll think it over," said Mason. "Do you think he could beat me?"

"I don't think he *would*," returned Ryan. "I think the Old Man would find a way to bring him into line, but there's no use taking chances, when you can just as well have a cinch."

"I suppose," remarked Mason, thoughtfully, "that an alliance of that sort is justifiable under some circumstances."

"Suppose," said Ryan, "you hold off, and suppose, just because you hold off, he makes a fight on you that forces the Old Man to drop you — what then? Why, we'd have to put up Baxter again, and Baxter might get through. I don't say he would, but he might, and it would be all your doings. It rested with you to stop him, and you didn't. Oh, you surely ought to fix it up with Pepper."

Mason got up and paced back and forth. The idea was repellant to him, but it was not so difficult to take Ryan's point of view, when he thought of the plans and hopes of the little woman upstairs. No good would come of his refusal. There was no likelihood that it would defeat Pepper. On

the other hand, his acquiescence made it practically certain that he would go to the Council, where he might accomplish something worth while.

"Oh, well," said Mason, at last, "if he doesn't ask too much of me when we get down to details, I'll fix it up with him. But it comes hard."

He felt uncomfortable and dissatisfied. Here was the beginning of the tangle of politics, and his first move was dictated by expediency rather than by principle. The reasoning that led to it was mentally, but not morally, convincing.

"Now, you're talking sense," asserted Ryan. "You'd have a hard time explaining it to the people of the ward if you dropped out now. Howe tells me they've been flocking to see you."

"They have," admitted Mason. "There was a steady stream of them the first day, and yesterday it was about the same."

"They expect a good deal of you, and you don't want to disappoint them." Ryan spoke with an air of frankness and sincerity. "By the way," he added, "do you know anything about the Independent Gas measure?"

Mason was instantly alert.

"The one that raised such a cry of 'Boodle!' when they tried to put it through a few months ago?" he asked.

"Yes; that's the one. Some of the people back

of that are good friends of the Old Man. You understand, of course," Ryan went on, hastily, "that the Old Man never touched a dishonest penny in his life. No one ever accused him of being a boodler. He plays the game of politics, and that's all."

Mason had turned such a searching gaze on Ryan that the latter lost something of his buoyant air. Still, he continued his remarks with an assumption of careless ease.

"There's a good bit in that measure for the campaign fund," he said, "and the Old Man never loses sight of the needs of the party treasury. Then, some of the men behind it have been useful to him, and can be of a lot more use."

"It's a notorious boodle and sand-bagging scheme!" exclaimed Mason.

Ryan shrugged his shoulders.

"We've got nothing to do with that," he urged. "All we've got to do is to take care of the men who can deliver the goods, and these men can deliver just what the Old Man needs to enable him to spread out a little. They can strengthen him at Springfield. One of them is there now as the representative of a district the Old Man never has been able to control. Now, that Independent Gas ordinance is coming up again in the next Council, Mason, and the Old Man wants to have it passed."

"I won't vote for it," said Mason, almost angrily.

"The people of this ward ain't worrying about it, and you're going to represent them," insinuated Ryan. "Why, you're practically pledged to run. If you don't, after the way they've rallied to your support, you might as well move out of the ward."

"Well, I *will* run," asserted Mason, hotly. "I may have no chance of winning, but I'll make the race."

"Oh, no, you won't, Mason," returned Ryan, with a significant smile. "If you throw down the Old Man you won't be nominated. Just look at the matter reasonably: This is one of the necessities of politics, and it is all that is asked of you. Just be square with the Old Man in this one thing. He has a right to demand it."

"He has no right to demand it," protested Mason, "and if I'm turned down for the nomination, I'll tell the reason why."

"The Old Man," pursued Ryan, "has been too foxy to stand for this ordinance publicly at any time. In fact, you will recall that he has condemned it. Do you think any one will believe you when you say he made it the price of your nomination? I tell you, Mason, you're in a tight place. The ward will be disgusted, and so will the Old Man. They'll say it was all a bluff, and you sold out, for Bob Howe will insist that you could have

had the nomination, if you really wanted it. They'll think they've been betrayed, and you can't tell them anything that'll make them think different. It's too late to do anything but go in and win any way you can."

Mason saw the force of this argument; he realised at last the meaning of the premature boom; he knew that he had been deliberately put in this awkward predicament; but it only served to rouse his indignation and anger.

"You go back to the Old Man," he almost shouted, "and tell him I wouldn't vote for that sandbagging gas ordinance if it would make me President of the United States! It isn't an honest deal, and he knows it!"

At the door Ryan paused to say: "You had a great chance, Mason, but you're out of it now. The Old Man could send you to the Legislature, and perhaps to Congress in time."

"The Old Man is a tricky, scheming scoundrel!" cried Mason, "and I won't give him the satisfaction of even beating me at the primaries. I'll draw out, and let the neighbours say what they will."

For a long time after Ryan had gone Mason sat buried in thought. He knew that he had done what was right, but the result was a great disappointment. And he dreaded the comments of the

people of the ward. They would not, and could not be made to, understand.

The door opened and Mrs. Mason entered softly. She noted his abstraction, his clouded brow, the total absence of his customary smile, and she went over and knelt by his chair.

"What's the matter, Joe?" she asked.

"I'm out of it," he replied, gloomily.

"You're not going to be alderman?"

"No. I can't be one honourably."

"Then you can't be one at all, of course," she said, bravely.

A moment later the door opened again, and Mrs. Mason passed out as softly as she had entered, leaving her husband silent and brooding. An hour afterward he found her in her room, weeping. That which seems a trifle to one may be much to another, and a dream had proved to be only a dream.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE OF HEART

THE news that Harold Darnell had been offered the Democratic nomination in the Twenty-fourth Ward occasioned much merriment. Darnell was a well-built, handsome youth, with curly brown hair and a smooth, almost boyish face. He was a society man in the better sense of that term — not a society idler, who had time and thought for nothing else, but a popular young man of social accomplishments, and one who always had been “in society.” He had been born to it and educated for it as much as for the legal profession, which, by his father’s advice, he had chosen as his calling in life. While his professional duties were not particularly engrossing, that really was of no great importance. He was not dependent upon the law for a living, and his father’s influence put enough business in his way to give him more than a fair pretence of doing something. But perhaps “pretence” is hardly the right word. He was industrious and ambitious. He wished to be a good lawyer, and to be a good

lawyer one must study constantly, so he studied. He proved himself conscientious and resourceful, too; no interests intrusted to him suffered from lack of attention, and he was ever alert to improve his opportunities and increase his business. For a rich man's son he was more than usually promising, for his habits were good and he gave his first thoughts to his work.

Even those who laughed loudest were willing to admit that he would make a good alderman, but still they laughed. It was such an absurd thing! Harold Darnell in the Council would seem as much out of place as the notorious Alderman Ben Hogan would seem in society. It was a joke. Indeed, not only society, but the whole city, was laughing at it.

"He'll be putting in an ordinance to make everybody wear full dress after six o'clock," said the facetious ones.

"He'll have the whole bunch playing ping-pong on the clerk's desk," was another jocular comment.

Out in the Twenty-fourth Ward the jokes and gibes took a little different form, but they were quite as numerous.

"Darnell and Hogan for ever!" was an exceedingly popular cry that Fred Enderly started, for the combination presented a mental picture that was unusually diverting.

"Darnell," Albert Dale solemnly informed a little

group, "is very busy to-day. He has an appointment with his friend, Mulcahey."

"Wrong!" put in Henry Bannen. "He's gone out to the Bridewell to talk over the situation with an unfortunate friend who had a disagreement with the presiding magistrate in a police court."

But Darnell himself never had the slightest intention of running. The politicians had felt so confident of him that they had let the news leak out before securing his consent, but the idea did not appeal to him at all. The associations would not be pleasant, the work would be distasteful, the salary was no object, and conditions were such that the title of "Alderman" had become almost a term of reproach. So, when informed that he could have the nomination if he wanted it, he promptly sent back word that he did not want it and would not take it. Then he went to a dinner-dance at the Dales, where he had to accept with the best grace possible many jokes at his expense.

"I tell you," he said, for the third or fourth time, "I'm not going to run."

"I don't blame you," remarked Albert Dale. "Of course, when a fellow gets into politics, he's got to be with the organisation, and you wouldn't look well in a white plug hat, alongside of Alderman Ben Hogan, in a County Democracy parade —

honest you wouldn't. That kind of a hat doesn't suit you at all."

"Misther Chairman!" cried Enderly, who was noted for his Irish mimicry, "I move you, sir-r, that we amind th' motion iv th'honour'ble gintleman on me lift f'r to take a dhrink, an' make it read that we do now take two dhrinks, an' charge it to th' fi-nance comity."

"Oh, I'd dearly love to see Mr. Darnell in the Council!" exclaimed Miss Maie Murison, when the laugh that greeted this sally had died away. Miss Murison had been christened "May." At the age of fifteen she had become "Mae"; at seventeen she was "Mai," and now at nineteen she was "Maie." Having reached the limit of possible changes in her given name, one cynical youth had been heard to remark that she was now principally interested in changing her family name. However that may be, her remark seemed to appeal to the imaginations of all those present, and there were several expressions of regret that Darnell had withdrawn.

"We'd all have been there the first night," asserted Emily Dale, "and I would have thrown a big bouquet on your desk. That's proper when a new alderman makes his first bow, isn't it?"

"Of course," chimed in Bannen, "and anything at all in the flower line is considered appropriate.

Why, I heard that two years ago, when Hogan's constituents went out to buy a floral offering, the biggest things they could find were a broken pillar and a pillow with the word 'Rest' on it. So they had those put on his desk, and he was the proudest man in the Council."

"I'd like to see the Council in action," said Isabel Shelby. "I've heard so many funny stories of the aldermen that I think it would be amusing. Won't you change your mind, Mr. Darnell, just to give us an excuse to go?"

"Sorry I can't oblige you," laughed Darnell, "but I really can't think of playing even a minor part in that kind of a burlesque."

"Perhaps that's the reason it's a burlesque," suggested Josephine Hadley.

"What's the reason?" asked Dale.

"That the men who could make it something else refuse to accept the parts assigned to them," answered Miss Hadley.

"A reformer!" cried Enderly, merrily. "She has the reform idea. I've seen it in the Citizens' Safety League circulars."

"And doesn't she put it well?" said Miss Murison. "Why, it's almost poetical."

Miss Hadley coloured, but refused to recede from the position she had taken, although she did not defend it aggressively.

"How can we have good aldermen," she asked, "if good men shirk their responsibilities?"

"Hear that!" exclaimed Enderly, turning to Darnell. "It's a compliment, for it implies that you're a good man. Make a bow, Harold, make a bow!"

"Why, Josephine, I believe you're a politician," commented Miss Shelby.

Miss Hadley made no reply to this, and the conversation drifted into other channels. By all but Darnell politics was forgotten in the dance that followed the dinner. He, however, had been impressed by the comment of the thoughtful girl, who was always advancing some novel ideas when they were least expected. Perhaps, if the comment had come from another, it would have made less of an impression, but somehow Miss Hadley always made him think. She had ideas — rather crude, perhaps, but still they were ideas. She thought for herself, and she gave heed to things that her companions hardly deemed worthy of attention. She was dreamy and yet practical. She pictured ideal conditions — not in Arcady, but in the city where she lived. Her knights were of the modern school, but they were nevertheless knights. Just what they could do was only vaguely defined in her mind, but she was sure they could do something — if they would.

Darnell sought her out during the dance, and then

they forgot to dance; but, as that had happened on several occasions during the preceding winter, it caused no comment. She appealed strongly to him. Tall, slender, graceful, with soft brown eyes and a smile that was sometimes thoughtlessly merry but more often thoughtful, she seemed to him very different from the other girls. Then, too, she was always giving him surprises. While she knew little of the great world outside of society, she knew enough to give her a foundation for theories that were diverting and frequently disconcerting. A young man of twenty-four, who has seen much of society, finds relief and enjoyment in the society of a girl who not only can, but does, think of something else, especially if she be bright and pretty.

"Do you thing I ought to run for alderman?" he asked.

"Of course I do," she answered, frankly.

"But everybody takes it as a joke," he urged, "and I don't like to be the butt of a joke."

"Oh, as for that," she answered, "I am in no position to advise you, of course. I don't know enough about it. But I don't see why it should be a joke, and I'm sure *I* wouldn't be laughed out of anything I ought to do."

"But think of the picture I'd make in the Council!" he pleaded, whimsically. "And what could I accomplish there?"

"I don't know," she replied, "but I should think you could do something. A man can do so much — if he will."

"Do *you* want me to run?" he asked, softly.

"Oh, it's nothing to me personally," she said, hastily. "I'm only a girl, and — But papa says good men are needed in the Council. How can we have them, if they're too selfish to make the necessary sacrifice? I suppose it is a sacrifice — indeed, I know it must be — and disagreeable, too — but a man ought to think of others."

"I'll do whatever you say," suggested Darnell, with subtle flattery. It would have been decidedly pleasing to him to make a personal matter of the affair; but Miss Hadley felt that they were getting on dangerous ground.

"I won't say a thing," she returned; and then: "Shall we dance now?"

A little of romance may be woven about the most prosaic affairs of life, and there is no telling to what even a little of romance may lead. Besides, Miss Hadley had her own ideas as to the motives that should inspire a man to do his duty.

At the conclusion of the dance Darnell strolled into the smoking-room.

"Th' gintleman from th' Twinty-foorth!" announced Enderly.

"Too bad you're not going to run," added Dale.

"You could get some new and startling ideas on morning, afternoon, and evening dress from Ben Hogan and 'Rainbow John.' According to newspaper reports, when either one of them is equipped for an outing of any sort, people without goggles have to shade their eyes."

"Well," returned Darnell, carelessly, "if you're seeking pointers on raiment, I'll make a study of them and give you the results."

"But you're not going to run!" protested Dale.

"But I am going to run!" retorted Darnell.

There was a brief interval of astonished silence, and then a sudden, knowing smile illumined the face of Dale.

"The reformer! the reformer!" he cried. "I saw him talking to her." And the others joined in with, "Hurrah for the reformer!"

In the ballroom, when the news spread, Miss Hadley blushed and looked pleased, although she insisted that she had had nothing to do with this change of heart. But she knew better.

CHAPTER VI.

UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS

"WHAT we're cryin' f'r," said Jim Casey, in his saloon, "is ray-form an' pussy-caffy ray-formers." Casey felt that he could say nothing worse than that. He catalogued men by their drinks, and the more complicated the drink the greater his contempt for the man. The straight whiskey man was his favourite, the beer man was neither good nor bad, the champagne man was his ideal of a sport, the cocktail man could be endured, but the pousse-café man was beneath contempt. "We're lukkin'," he went on, "f'r a lad that can go in on th' gr-reat wave iv ray-form an' come out with th' undhertow, an' I'm thinkin' we've found him in th' claw-hammer dood. 'Tis th' way iv thim all. They go in a-whoopin', an' afther a bit ye have f'r to put out th' grapplin'-hooks to find thim. In a year ye'll see this lad in th' po-litical morgue, so badly bunged up that his fri'nds'll know him only be th' gold fillin' iv a front tooth."

Casey did not take kindly to the candidacy of

Harold Darnell, and in this he was not alone. There were many who shared his views. The young man had figured too prominently in social affairs; they could not dissociate him from pink teas and ping-pong. But Darnell had the consolation of knowing that at least he was not a nonentity. He was not ignored; in fact, he had the centre of the stage. The candidates in other wards received scant attention, except from their immediate adherents, while Darnell was the talk of the whole city. He was ridiculed, praised, and blamed; it was asserted that he was a mere idler, and it was also asserted that he had made a study of civic matters in other cities, especially European cities, and had many practical ideas. The very circumstances of the case made it necessary that a man should be unequivocally for him or against him; there was no evading the issue. And it is not unlikely that he unwittingly played just the part that Ned Bell wished him to play, creating a diversion that enabled the "machine" to do some very "smooth" work in other parts of the city. Indeed, the affairs in the Eighth, where Mason had been dropped, would have received more general attention, in all probability, if the public mind had not been so fully occupied with Darnell.

In the brief time before the primaries and the ward conventions, "the society candidate," as he

was called, succeeded in giving the city some surprises. To Billy Ryan had been assigned the task of personally conducting this campaign, and Ryan found the work congenial. The young man was affable and democratic in manner; he was "a good mixer," as Ryan put it. Wherever he went, he created a favourable impression, and Ryan saw to it that he went everywhere and met every one. His political stock boomed; even the "rough and ready" contingent of ward workers finally conceded that he was "all right," and "the real thing." A delegation that went to see him at his father's house, where he lived, came out walking on tiptoes and singing his praises.

"Great! great!" was the exclamation of the leader, in telling about it. "He treated us like we belonged to the gayboy bunch — no back room fer us; not any. Right into the room with the glad fixings we goes, an' a swell guy showin' us the way. Chairs that you're afraid to sit in, an' all that, an' a floor like a roller rink. Oh, we was steppin' high an' comin' down soft, an' lookin' two an' three times before turnin', so's not to bump into a million dollar statoo of a naked woman holdin' a lamp. Oh, nothin' was too good fer us. He treated us like we belonged there, an' we ain't got so's we dare step hard yet."

And when Darnell met the same men amid their

customary surroundings, he acted as if he belonged there. In truth, he displayed diplomatic qualities that made Ryan actually enthusiastic.

"We've got a winner, and no mistake," the latter told the Old Man. "You can't put him anywhere that he don't fit."

So the day of the ward conventions arrived, with everything running smoothly. The Old Man cared less about these than he did about the city convention that was to nominate a mayor, but nevertheless delegates that he could control had been named wherever he thought it necessary. It was his ambition to be more than a local "boss," but the wards constitute the foundation of the perfect "machine," and he did not neglect them.

Then, almost at the last moment, something occurred to disarrange his plans. Bob Howe was the first to get an inkling of what was going on. The rumour reached his ears that Mason would be put on the ballot as an independent candidate by petition. For a moment he was disturbed; then he laughed.

"So much the better," he commented. "Mason and O'Hara will split the vote that we couldn't get anyway, and we can hold enough in the lower end of the ward to make it a cinch for Baxter. Either of them alone would be harder to beat than both together. They may cut into the 'machine' a little

in the lower end, but not as much as they'll cut into each other in the upper end."

The reasoning was good, but later it was discovered that the facts had been misunderstood. Word came to Howe that Mason, O'Hara, and Elbert Norris had been in conference. Norris was one of the leading men in the Citizens' Safety League, which was working hard for an honest Council, and such a conference might mean much. Further reports showed that Norris had called to see Mason several times, bringing O'Hara with him the last time.

"That man O'Hara would do anything to beat Baxter," growled Howe, and he immediately sent out scouts with instructions to "get next to what was going on and do it in a hurry." They brought back even more disquieting rumours, and apparent confirmation of them in the fact that Martin Appleby, a Republican, had been present at the last conference also, and afterward had let fall some very significant remarks. Howe waited for no more. The ward convention would meet in a little over two hours, and quick action was necessary.

Senator Pepper was leaning against Casey's bar, idly discussing the situation, when Howe rushed into the place.

"Where's the Old Man?" cried Howe. "I've been to his office, and can't find him."

"What shtrange idees ye have," commented Casey, "that ye sh'u'd be lukkin' f'r th' Ol' Man in his office, whin he do be havin' clerks there f'r to do th' wor-rk."

"Quit your fooling, Jim!" retorted Howe, excitedly. "There's hell to pay in the Eighth, and I've got to find the Old Man."

"He's probably at the Democratic Club," suggested Senator Pepper. "What's wrong?"

"Jump into the cab, and I'll tell you as we go along," said Howe, as he darted out the door, closely followed by the Senator, while Casey shook his head solemnly, and remarked: "Some lad's cast a shoe at th' beginnin' iv th' r-race, or ilse he's been beatin' thim out iv th' campaign assissment."

The Old Man held an appointive fee office that paid him so well that it was unnecessary for him to make money out of politics in other ways. Aside from that office, the extent of the profits of which were not generally understood, the rewards for his political work were the excitement and the joys of success. It was a glorious game. If questioned, he would have said that he was in it "for the fun of the thing," and very likely he would have considered this a truthful statement. He never headed a ticket, he had been beaten the only time he had run for a minor office in the gift of the people; but he was a far-sighted manager, and he had no

trouble in getting any office he desired that was in the gift of the men he nominated and helped to elect. Perhaps the "fun of the thing" would not have appealed to him so strongly in other circumstances. However, he prospered, and it was his boast that no one dared even insinuate that he was not financially honest. But financial and political honesty are not always allied.

He was in no sense an excitable person; he was much too ponderous for that. But his mind acted quickly in an emergency. He was quick of thought, but slow of speech, which is just what a leader ought to be. Furthermore, he had been in politics long enough to be familiar with every trick and also with every feature of the local situation. Others were familiar with the affairs in certain districts; he was familiar with everything; and he alone knew exactly what he sought to gain.

When Howe and Pepper appeared at the Democratic Club, the Old Man was chatting pleasantly with some of his cronies. There was nothing in the situation to worry him, and he was simply waiting to hear that the prepared programme had been carried out in the various wards. The primaries had settled practically everything. But there was that in the expressions of the two men that made him stop in the middle of a sentence.

"What is it?" he asked.

"There's a new deal in the Eighth," answered Howe, "and Baxter hasn't one chance in a million. As soon as he's put up, Mason will be nominated by petition, endorsed by the Citizens' Safety League, and O'Hara will withdraw in his favour. The petitions are already in circulation. Tom Lewis saw one, and heard Martin Appleby say that O'Hara was ready to do this to beat Baxter."

"We're up against it," added Pepper, gloomily, "and it's going to weaken me a lot."

"Well," returned the Old Man, rising and beckoning the two to follow him to a private room, "you've got to make the best of it."

Once in the private room, he gave his orders — distinctly and authoritatively, but with no evidence of the excitement so noticeable in the others.

"Pepper," he said, "get hold of Baxter and tell him he's out of it. Tell him he's got to stand aside, but we'll take care of him in some other way. Tell him I say so, and explain why." Then turning to Howe: "You've got the boys well in hand out there, haven't you?"

"Sure. With you behind me, I could nominate the Devil himself out there to-day."

"Well, nominate Mason," ordered the Old Man.

"Mason?"

"Yes, Mason. If he's going to be elected anyhow, we want him on our ticket."

"You know how he stands?"

"I know that we can do more with him as a Democratic alderman than we can as an independent with nothing but a reform backing," asserted the Old Man. "If we can't do what we want to, we've got to do what we can, and I'll get him yet — if he goes in as a Democrat." The Old Man looked at his watch. "It's going to take quick work," he added, pointedly.

Howe and Pepper reached the hall less than half an hour before the time set for calling the convention to order, and immediately thereafter old-timers knew that "something was doing," to use their popular phrase. Pepper and Baxter were closeted in an anteroom, while Howe picked out a delegate here and there in the neighbouring saloons, and finally transferred his activities to the hall itself. Baxter was disappointed, but tractable. He did not have to be told that he could never win if O'Hara threw his strength to Mason, but he would have preferred to retire in favour of almost any other candidate.

"You don't hate it any worse than I do," argued Pepper. "I had my little song and dance with him, and I don't want him; but, if we've got to have him, I'd rather have him on our ticket than on some other."

"Think of a new man that never had his hands

on the ropes before putting us in a hole like this!" grumbled Baxter.

"Well, he holds the right cards this time," returned Pepper, philosophically, "and we can't do anything now, even if it does go hard to have a beginner beat us out at a game we played when he was in knee-pants."

Howe was having less trouble, for a good many of the delegates knew and liked Mason, and practically all of them understood that they were there to do the bidding of the "machine." Then, too, when it was learned that Baxter had gracefully stepped aside, there was nothing else for them to do.

Elsewhere in the ward there was little interest in the proceedings. Word had gone forth that Baxter was to be nominated, and, as it was not customary for conventions to settle such matters themselves, this information was accepted as authentic. His chances against O'Hara and the possibilities of a third ticket were discussed idly, but that was all. It was the dull time of the day that the convention met. The housewives were busy at home, the idlers were gathered about the hall, the storekeepers were resting.

Then suddenly the Eighth Ward woke up. The convention had been called to order at noon, and half an hour later there was a sudden stir along the

business streets. The unexpected had happened. No one knew how the news circulated; it seemed to be in the air.

"But Mason withdrew!" cried one man after another.

"Well, he was nominated, anyhow," was the invariable response.

Mason himself was the most surprised man in the ward. There had been no time to notify him of the change of plan; he had been named in an emergency on the chance that he would accept. But there were complications. He was practically pledged to the deal engineered by Norris of the Safety League, and which apparently would fall through if Baxter were not a candidate, his defeat being the main thing sought.

A boy brought him the first news, and he laughed. A man followed with corroboration, and he looked serious. Then two men came in a carriage, and hustled him away to say a word or two to "the boys."

"I don't know about this," he said, bewildered. "I'm making no pledges."

"Don't want any," said the men.

"And I'm sort of half tied up in a plan to —"

"You're a Democrat, and this is the Democratic nomination," interrupted the men. "You were named by acclamation."

"I wonder," muttered Mason, in the slang of the ward, "where I get off at."

"At the city hall after the election," laughed the men.

So Mason went with them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INFLUENCE OF WOMAN

Two men, troubled, turned to two women for consolation and inspiration, although in different manner and with somewhat different motives. Mason wanted indorsement of that which he wished to do; Darnell wanted to do that which would secure indorsement. Mason was enthusiastic, but worried; Darnell was weary and doubtful.

"I'm afraid I ought to have declined that nomination," said Mason. "Perhaps I ought to do it yet."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Mason, who could see only good fortune in the unexpected change in the situation.

"Well, I had practically entered into a combination with O'Hara and Norris to run as an independent, and now I find myself on the very ticket it was desired to beat. It looks tricky."

Mrs. Mason was not deep, but neither was she stupid, and in this instance her perception was the keener because of her own hopes.

"The object of the combination was to beat Baxter, wasn't it?" she asked.

He admitted that it was.

"Well, you've already beaten him!" she exclaimed, triumphantly.

This was the kind of encouragement that Mason wanted. A man frequently relies on his wife to make things right with his conscience. But, to Mason's surprise, Norris of the Safety League also took the same view of it.

"Of course," said Norris, "now that Baxter is out of it, we can't very well ask O'Hara to withdraw, but we'll indorse you both, and we're sure of a good alderman, whichever way it goes."

The Safety League's aim was already accomplished, so far as that ward was concerned, but the situation did not exactly please Mason.

"With O'Hara's strength added to mine," he told his wife, "I was sure of defeating Baxter, but I'm not so certain I can beat O'Hara."

"Perhaps," she returned, "you ought to decline that nomination after all."

Mason laughed and kissed her.

"I never knew you to waver so before," he said. "You want that fifteen hundred dollars a year."

"I'm thinking of the ward, too," she answered.

"I want it to have the best alderman." And she

honestly believed the needs of the ward influenced her views as much as the needs of the family.

Over in the Twenty-fourth Ward Darnell was losing enthusiasm because Miss Hadley did not seem to be as much interested in his campaign as he had hoped she would be. The excitement appealed to him, but there was something else that he desired.

"It's disagreeable," he complained.

"Of course," she replied.

"And what can I accomplish?" he asked.

"That's for you to decide," she answered.

"Harvey Merrill, the Republican candidate, is a good man," he went on, "and, so far as the interests of the ward are concerned, it's really a matter of no moment which of us is elected."

"If you think so," she said, "I don't see why you are running."

"For you," he insinuated.

"How foolish!" she returned, with a laugh.

"Do you think so?" he asked, nettled by this reply.

The smile left her face, and she became more serious.

"Yes," she said, "I do. A man should have high ambitions."

"Is it not a high ambition to strive to make one's self the ideal of a true woman?" he urged.

"No," she answered. "It is flattering to the vanity of the woman, but that is all. A man should be above that; he should have greater aims. It is for him to compel the admiration of woman, not merely to seek it. He should make his own ideals; he should be strong and true and good; he should make the most of his opportunities — not because it will please some woman, but because he owes it to himself."

"Sounds like a Sunday-school lesson," he commented, smilingly, and yet thoughtfully. "I thought that woman, lovely woman, rather favoured the chivalrous methods of the knights of the olden time."

"Even in that day," she returned, "woman deemed it no particular credit to win the allegiance of a knight who had done nothing for himself. She wanted the man who had accomplished something, and she wants him yet. Have you read anywhere that her smiles were for the carpet knights?"

"But the Council!" he protested.

"It is something," she asserted. "It is an opportunity, if only a minor one. And," with just a little of raillery, "if you must serve woman to be happy, why, woman needs a champion in the Council. I know that mamma is interested in some philanthropic enterprises that necessitate dealings with the aldermen, and there must be many others."

"And you?" he asked.

"Oh, I have no personal interest in the matter, of course," she answered. "I am interested only in men who are men, and they ought to be men just because they are men."

This was enigmatical, but he grasped the underlying meaning, and it brought to him a new resolve, born of an undefined feeling of resentment that she had failed to take his view of the matter.

"After all," he soliloquised, as he walked home, "it's a man's game, to be played by men. I'll cut the romance out."

But when a young man proceeds to cut the romance out of anything, it is generally an indication that the romance is just beginning to creep in. Darnell determined to show his strength and independence, for his own satisfaction, but — somehow, beneath it all, there was a desire to demonstrate something to Miss Hadley. This desire might be inspired by resentment or a very opposite sentiment, but it was there; and, when he had settled on a course, Darnell was far from being a weak or vacillating young man.

"Perhaps I have been inclined to take things easy," he said, "but now I'll show them what a whirlwind campaign is like."

CHAPTER VIII.

A WHIRLWIND CAMPAIGN

DARNELL was as good as his word, and Billy Ryan was delighted.

"For a day or so after the nomination," said Ryan, "I thought you were beginning to cool off just a little too fast, and we want to make a few star plays with you."

"Just make out your programme," returned Darnell, "and, whenever you put me down for a number, I'll take the stage and do the best I can. If it calls for extra quick work, I'll get out my automobile."

Ryan was dubious for a moment, and then enthusiastic.

"Say!" he cried, "that's a good scheme! As long as we're in for the hoity-toity we might as well play the limit. Get out the machine! I'll bet it will make a hit, and anyhow it will keep us from being forgotten."

So the automobile became an important feature of the local campaign. At first it both startled and stupefied the rank and file of the party, but after a day or so they began to point to it with pride. It

was an evidence of progress; it showed, they said, that their candidate was "a hummer." And hum he did. When the campaign was well under way he was rushed from one part of the city to another. All wanted to see and hear him; to him had been assigned the spectacular part in the political drama, and he played it to perfection. He was frank, clever, democratic; he turned aside the shafts of ridicule and criticism directed at him with an expert hand.

"My name is Harold," he told one audience, "and some editors and speakers have been having lots of fun with it. They say it's real sweet, and perhaps it is. A real sweet name won't do any harm in the Council, anyway — some of the names there have lost their sweetness — and it's just as good a name as Mickey Dugan; no better."

This caught the crowd, and there were cries of "Bully boy!" and "You're all right!"

"I play tennis, too," he admitted, "and golf. Why shouldn't I? It takes a quick eye, a quick brain, a quick arm, and a quick foot to play a good game of tennis. What more do you want? Is there anything effeminate in that? And as for golf — well, if you can pick out anything weak and soft in Scotch whiskey, let's hear what it is!"

Again the crowd roared, for he was speaking to the rough element now, and he was giving them just the kind of a talk that was most effective.

"I play baseball, also," he went on, "but they don't say anything about that. And you haven't heard that I was halfback on my college football team, either. That hasn't anything to do with the Council, but neither has ping-pong or tennis or pink teas, of which so much has been said. And, speaking of pink teas, I confess that I have attended such affairs. Why? Because I was invited, and you'd all go, too, under the same circumstances. If you wouldn't, I'd be ashamed of you. I've no use for a man who runs away from pretty girls or women."

Here the crowd yelled itself hoarse.

"This won't make me a good alderman or a bad alderman," he added, "but it's just as well to admit my sins. I do all these things, and I have an automobile. You've heard about that automobile, of course. It's a terrible thing to have an automobile. No one ever ought to have one—unless he can afford it. If you'll step outside when I'm through, you'll see me ride away in my automobile, just like the aristocrat I'm said to be. And that haughty aristocrat, Billy Ryan, will be with me. You've noticed how proud he is since he began to associate with me—never speaks to any of you any more. That's due to the frightful influence of the terrible automobile."

This picture of the affable Billy Ryan was naturally greeted with roars of laughter.

"But I'll tell you frankly," he said, in conclusion, "that I never yet have consulted that automobile about my conduct, and I don't intend to begin now. When I get in the Council I'm going to do what Harold Darnell thinks is right. That's the kind of a dear, sweet boy I am!"

When he jumped into his automobile to go on to the next hall he looked about him, and then asked: "Anybody going my way? There's room for two more."

The men looked from one to another and laughed.

"Get in, Jim," urged one. "You'll never have another chance like this."

"Get in yourself," was the retort.

"Get in, both of you," said Darnell, "but be mighty careful."

"Will it bust?" asked the first, anxiously.

"No," answered Darnell, "but it will hurt your reputation. It's influence is bad. The first thing you know you'll be an aristocrat, and your neighbours won't like you any more."

This is merely a specimen incident of the whirlwind campaign, and it is given to show the kind of a campaigner Darnell proved himself to be. He was the star and Ryan was his manager. So popular did he become that he could not begin to keep all the engagements made for him, but he did his best. At headquarters "Send us Darnell" was the persistent

cry. The voters of only one ward were directly interested in him, but the voters of all wards had an indirect interest, and strangely enough the most insistent demands were from the tough and the slum wards. Even the notorious First sought him.

"Say!" said one of the precinct captains in that ward one day, "ain't you goin' to send us the dude fer a few spiels? We've been hearin' he's a good spender, an' anyhow the lads want to see him."

Darnell's reputation as a "spender" was deserved. He had contributed liberally to the campaign fund, and Ryan confidentially informed the Old Man that he was always "ready to buy" when it was at all advisable.

"He's a wonder," said Ryan. "He takes to it like a duck to water. Unless you're ready to let him go to Congress or the Legislature or be mayor or something when he gets through with the Council, you'll have to begin putting weights on him to hold him down. He has the whole town crazy, and the craziest of all are the boys who never have more than two bits in their pockets at one time. I'm going to take him over into the Eighth tomorrow to help out Mason. Bob Howe says they need him, for O'Hara is putting up a strong fight."

"That's right," admitted the Old Man. "It's a fight to a finish in the Eighth."

"Am I playing him right?" asked Ryan.

"Couldn't be better," answered the Old Man. "Just you keep him going, and you'll be doing your share. Keep him in the public eye, very much in the public eye — so much that the public can't see anything else. I'll see to the rest."

The Old Man gave Ryan a meaning look, and Ryan laughed.

"I like the job," the latter said. "You'll hear from us next in the Eighth, where they're crazy to see the Greatest Show on Earth."

Ryan had not overstated the case. The Eighth did not care much about Darnell, but it wanted to see him and his automobile; it objected to being deprived of the great spectacular feature of the campaign. So the following evening the big automobile, with the chauffeur, Darnell, and Ryan, bumped over the uneven pavements of the Eighth Ward, and the Eighth was happy.

At the first hall Darnell and Mason met. Each had heard something of the other, and each was prepossessed in the other's favour. In a general way Darnell understood how Mason had forced a nomination from the Democratic "machine," and Mason had heard much of this "silk-stockings," whose democratic bearing and good hard sense had made him popular with those who at first had been most inclined to scoff. There was admiration and respect on both sides. Mason admired the quali-

ties so unexpectedly developed in a rich man's son, while Darnell appreciated the difficulties and temptations of an honest man in Mason's political surroundings, and also gave him credit for a cleverness he did not possess. At first Darnell was under the impression that Mason had deliberately played the game of politics so as to force the nomination; later he had to admit that such cleverness was not in keeping with the blunt nature of the Eighth Ward candidate, but respect for his straightforward honesty was increased. There was nothing subtle or tricky about Mason; he took the straight path to any goal he sought to reach. Darnell, on the other hand, while in no sense tricky, was diplomatic and tactful. Each had qualities that the other admired, but did not possess — Mason the strength and Darnell the skill.

Darnell made the hit of the campaign in the Eighth Ward. He was at his best, and he kept his audience in a roar of laughter and approval. He spoke of Mason and for Mason.

"They say he isn't smart enough for the Council," he said; "that his intentions are good, but he isn't sharp enough and quick enough to accomplish anything for the ward in such a body. Now, it looks to me as if a man who had two 'machines' and the Citizens' Safety League all 'in the air' at the same

time isn't the kind of a fellow to be tricked to any great extent."

Ryan scowled at this, and the Old Man was displeased when it was reported to him, but they had to make the best of it. Darnell was a privileged character.

"And, besides," Darnell went on, "the man who is slow, persistent, and earnest generally gets what he goes after in the long run. It's like a football game. You know something about football, of course. Well, the hard-fought game isn't won by spectacular plays, tricky passes, and end runs, but by bucking the line. Mason is the man to buck the line. If he needs anybody to go round the end, he can pass me the ball, and then there'll have to be mighty quick work to block the play. I'm an expert on end runs."

While not well versed in the details of football, the men of the Eighth knew enough about it to grasp the meaning of this, and it caught their fancy.

Mason's speech was like the man himself. Lurking behind his good-natured smile, which had reasserted itself with the ending of the troublesome complications, was a strong, but not a subtle, mind. He was politically ignorant and unsophisticated, so far as political methods were concerned, but he had the ideas of an honest man, and he stated them forcefully. He lacked wit, for good nature and wit are

not necessarily allied, but he spoke with a captivating frankness.

"That kind of a talk will go better in my ward than it will here," said Darnell, as they left the last hall on their list, for they had gone through the Eighth together in the automobile. "They're too busy to laugh over in the Twenty-fourth; if a fellow doesn't take things seriously in politics they think he's weak. I wish you'd come over and hammer at them a little. They're interested in you, anyhow, as a result of the unexpected happenings in the Eighth."

"I'm ready any time," answered Mason.

"But just now," put in Ryan, "let's take a run down to Casey's. I'm thirsty, and Casey is crazy to see Darnell."

"Who's Casey?" asked Darnell.

"A character," answered Ryan. "You ought to meet him and talk to him. He's worth it."

Darnell was willing, but Mason hesitated. The saloon feature was what he disliked most in campaigning, but, as Ryan explained, "it's part of local politics," and Mason had to regretfully admit that it was, especially in the Eighth Ward. So, being urged, he went along.

Casey carefully wiped his hand on his apron before extending it over the bar to Darnell. Meanwhile he was studying the young man.

"He luks like a clean lad," he muttered, "but they'll shpill dirt on him yet."

Then he turned to the stocky Mason.

"Oho!" he exclaimed, "ye're th' lad that put thim all to th' bad over in th' Eighth. I'm glad to see ye, I am so. Anny felly that can throw th' hooks into th' Ol' Man is good enough f'r my money."

"But you're a Democrat, Jim," protested Ryan.

"I am an' I am not," answered Casey; "but annyhow ivery wan has to be dumped wanst in a while to keep him from gettin' too heady. Th' Ol' Man had it comin' to him, an' I'm glad he got it."

"He gave me the nomination," laughed Mason.

"Sure," answered Casey, "an' f'r why? F'r because he had to; but I'm thinkin' he don't like ye a little bit. Keep ye-er eye on him, an' don't ye iver let him get th' undher holt."

Ryan passed this off with a laugh, and motioned the two candidates to follow him into the back room. There they found Senator Pepper, Alderman Bayler, Bob Howe, and Tom Lewis, Howe's right-hand man, comparing notes and discussing the outlook. One comment, made just as they entered, arrested Darnell's attention.

"The Old Man may know what he's doing," Pepper was saying, "but it looks to me to be time

to put the brakes on the whirlwind campaign, if he doesn't want to lose his grip somewhere."

Then the subject of conversation was suddenly changed, and all entered upon a discussion of the many amusing happenings of the campaign.

Shortly thereafter the bell rang, and Casey slowly unlimbered himself to go back after the orders. He had talked more freely with Mason, but he had the greater curiosity relative to Darnell, and he felt that he was now on the point of making a most interesting discovery.

"Is he a shport or a dood or a common man?" he asked himself. "Will he be callin' f'r wine or absinthe frappy or claret poonch or whiskey or beer? I'll have him placed now."

Casey waited patiently in the doorway for the orders, but his gaze kept straying to Darnell.

"I don't believe I care for anything," said Mason, when his turn came. "I'm not used to drinking, and I've had a few beers already."

"Better join me," suggested Darnell, who was "doing the honours."

"What are you going to have?"

"A little mineral water. I'm not a teetotaller," with a genial laugh, "but neither am I a tank."

"Make it two," said Mason.

Casey walked back to the bar, meditating.

"He's not a shport," he said, "an' he's not a

dood, an' he's not a common man, but in th' wor-rds iv me fri'nd, Rainbow John, he's a wise guy. No lad iv sinse goes afther th' booze record whin he's outclassed."

Casey knew something of the capacity of the others.

CHAPTER IX.

“COUPLED IN THE BETTING”

It was Harry Corbett who spoke of Darnell and Mason as “coupled in the betting,” but the phrase was a good one, and it caught popular fancy. From the moment they met they conducted a combination campaign, going everywhere together, and they proved to be a strong pair — much stronger than they would have been had they been more alike in their manner and methods.

Corbett was a newspaper reporter, and the phrase he coined was used in one of his descriptions of the spectacular part of the campaign. Thus it attained wide publicity and was promptly taken up.

Darnell was eating a late breakfast when Corbett first appeared on the scene. Whirlwind campaigns involve late hours and a considerable physical strain, so Darnell had fixed his breakfast hour as “the time when I am ready for it,” and that might be anywhere from nine to twelve o’clock. In this he had an advantage over Mason, who had to give considerable attention to his store, but because Mason could not

rest was no reason why Darnell should not. His legal engagements were not numerous or pressing, and were all wisely made for the afternoon.

Eleven o'clock happened to be the breakfast hour the morning that Corbett was announced, and, as he said his business was of importance, Darnell had him shown into the breakfast-room.

"Mr. Darnell," began the reporter in a business-like way, "the *Recorder* has been featuring you in this campaign."

"I've noticed it," replied Darnell.

"And it wants to feature you still more."

"Why?"

"Well," explained Corbett, as if he were advancing an incontrovertible argument for the course pursued, "you make good reading."

"Oh!" said Darnell, "I make good reading."

"You certainly do," asserted Corbett. "There's nobody who can see a story quicker than McAuley, our managing editor, and, to be frank, you're a story."

"Humourous, tragic, dramatic, or romantic?" asked Darnell, smiling.

"Can't say yet," answered Corbett. "Wait till we get to the end. But just now we're interested in the details. Would you mind making a place for me in your automobile?"

"I guess not, but suppose I should?" quizzically.

“Then I’d have to get another automobile and follow,” returned the reporter, promptly. “You see, when McAuley wants a thing he wants it the worst kind of a way, and he wants this. ‘Darnell and Mason are the features of this campaign,’ he told me, ‘and, while you’re resting, I wish you’d get the story for about two columns a day.’ When McAuley has something on that’s going to make a fellow hump himself, he always tells him to do it while he’s resting. ‘But suppose he won’t take me,’ I said to him, ‘what then?’ And he came back at me with, ‘Don’t you suppose I’ve got anything to do but to sit here and solve your fool little problems? Go out and get the story.’ So it’s up to me to get another automobile if you won’t take me in yours.”

“Oh, you can go in mine, of course,” laughed Darnell. “But be gentle with me. I’m new to politics.”

“Oh, I’m to do the descriptive,” replied Corbett. “If they want to roast you, they’ll do it editorially, but I don’t think they want to. My business is to tell something about you and what you do and how you do it. When do you start out?”

Darnell gave him the hour, and Corbett left.

This was the beginning of an association that developed into something close to personal friendship. Corbett was clever and well-posted. He

knew all the local politicians and officials, and was familiar with the gossip concerning them. While, in an effort to produce readable "copy," he took some liberties with his subjects, he was perfectly frank about it, and there never was anything in his inventions that was in the least harmful.

"If it makes good reading and hurts no one, what's the difference?" he demanded, when Darnell ran across an amusing story about himself that had no foundation in fact. "Why, half the stories that are told of public men aren't true of the men they're told about. You can't tell a story of an unknown man with any success; you've got to put it on some one who is known, and, if the latter is wise, he's mighty glad to have you do it. That's what helps to keep him before the public. It's the only thing that keeps a whole lot of men from being forgotten, and they know it. A good story travels farther and sticks in the memory longer than a good speech, and it's still making points for a man when his vote on some important bill is lost in the shuffle.

"You know 'Artful Arthur' Ferguson, the alderman from the Fourth, don't you?" he went on. "Well, he's wise. I ran across a bully good story once, and I didn't know who to put it on. Somehow it didn't seem to fit any one who came to mind until I thought of Ferguson. Now, the story was true, but it wasn't true of Ferguson; it was all news

to him when he saw it in print, and the next time he saw me he began to reproach me.

" 'It's a lie,' he said.

" 'I know it,' I admitted.

" 'I ought to go to your editor and make a kick,' he went on.

" 'What's the use?' I asked. You see, the editors know we do these things, but they don't like to be told about it.

" 'It's enough to make a man mad to be lied about,' he said. 'It isn't honest or fair. I ought to jump on you good and hard.'

" 'Well?' I returned, inquiringly, for he was no stranger to me.

" 'But I won't,' he added. 'It's a good story. Come and have a drink and a cigar, and then promise me one thing.'

" 'What?' I asked.

" 'Never tell another story on me — unless it's a good one, as good as this one.'

"And that story," said Corbett, in conclusion, "has been told on Ferguson so often that he's come to believe it himself."

With such tales as this the reporter entertained Darnell and Mason while they were passing from hall to hall, and incidentally he threw some strong sidelights on various political characters. He was inclined to be cynical, but never bitter. Cynicism

comes naturally to the experienced reporter. He sees so much of pretence and insincerity in the line of his work, especially political work, that in time he finds himself doubting the possibility of an unselfish and disinterested action. Still, Corbett was only mildly cynical; not offensively pessimistic.

"What do you suppose the Old Man is going to do with you?" he asked, one evening.

"Do with us!" repeated Mason, recalling with some anxiety the overtures that had previously been made to him.

"Of course," returned Corbett. "You don't suppose for a minute that he hasn't some plans, do you? That isn't his style. Now, you," to Mason, "had him on the hip, and he had to surrender; and you," to Darnell, "have been given free rein to do about as you please; but don't you ever take your eyes off the Old Man. He hasn't played his hand out yet, and he isn't in politics for his health. Some day, when you're not looking, he'll try to put the harness on you. Oh, I know the Old Man! It's a certainty he'd land either one of you alone, but — well, coupled, I don't know but I'd put a small bet on you myself."

"Well, we're coupled," laughed Darnell, "and we intend to stay coupled. So far as possible we'll make it both or neither."

"You can have my money," asserted Corbett,

promptly. “With the start you have, and running easily together, I believe you could win now, even if the Old Man tried to head you off. And that’s saying a good deal, for he’s made a hippodrome out of many a race that has started honestly. Ask Ryan.”

“The Old Man’s all right,” insisted Ryan.

“Ryan,” explained Corbett, jokingly, “is an assistant trainer in the Democratic stables. I ought not to have left it to him.”

Ryan was not exactly pleased with all that Corbett said and did, but he had too much sense to show it. The reporter was doing good work, and Ryan could not afford to quarrel with so valuable a press-agent, when notoriety was desired. Besides, Corbett helped out as master of ceremonies. He was on familiar terms with many outside of the coterie with which Ryan was intimate. He brought the little party in contact with practically every one, and a wide acquaintance is not the least desirable thing in a political campaign, especially when the candidates have in them the elements of popularity. Among others, Corbett made Darnell and Mason acquainted with Alderman Ferguson.

“He’s a Republican,” he explained, “but I don’t believe it’s his fault; I think he was born so. Besides, there’s no politics in the Council.”

“No politics in the Council!” exclaimed Darnell.

"None at all," asserted Corbett. "The Citizens' Safety League says so, and the 'gang' proves it. You'll find men of both parties on the League's goody-goody list, and also in the 'gang.' The League simply asks what a man has done, while the 'gang' is only interested in what he will do."

"I've heard a good deal of talk about the 'gang,'" remarked Darnell, "but I can't find that it is very clearly defined."

"It isn't," admitted Corbett. "Some aldermen are known to be out of it, some are known to be in it, and of some the only thing you can say is that they never were caught with the goods on them."

"And how about Ferguson?" asked Mason.

"Well," replied Corbett, thoughtfully, "it may be safely said of Ferguson that he never will be arrested for neglecting his family. At one election the leaders in his ward discussed the advisability of dropping him. It was a mere matter of expediency, you know; he had been in office long enough."

"Who do you think we should put up as your successor?" they asked.

"Well," replied Ferguson, in his smooth way, "I have a son out at the house who's a fine promising boy, and he'll be old enough to vote by election day."

With this as a preliminary, Darnell and Mason were prepared to meet a character, and they found

one. Ferguson was large, but soft of speech. He was good-natured, but his manner was insinuating and suggestive of secrecy and confidence; it made the listener think that great trust was being reposed in him.

“Did you ever hear about me and the man who was going to commit suicide?” he asked, when the campaign and campaign stories were under discussion. “I don’t tell it to everybody, but it’s a good story. You see, there was a no-account fellow used to come to my office and threaten to commit suicide.

“‘It’s no use,’ he’d say. ‘Everything’s against me, and I might as well go and jump in the lake.’

“Well, I’d talk him out of it, and maybe give him a bit of a loan to help him out, but in a week he’d be back with the same old talk. He was discouraged and ready to quit. Sometimes he’d weep. Of course, the only trouble with him was that he wouldn’t brace up and try to do something; and when I found he was worrying his old mother by making the same threats, I thought it was time to do something. So, when he came again, I said to him, ‘John,’ I said, ‘I’m sorry for you, but if you’re determined, I’ll do what I can to help you. Come with me.’ I got a coil of rope and an axe, and took him to the river, which was frozen over pretty solid just then.

“‘Now,’ I said, giving him the axe, ‘this is the

best chance you'll have. Go to work and chop a hole in the ice.'

"This seemed to worry him some, but he started in. He thought I was bluffing, and he kept eyeing me pretty hard.

" 'Say!' he said, after a bit, 'what's the rope for?'

" 'I'm going to tie it to you when you jump in,' I told him. 'Your folks,' I said, 'would never forgive me, if I didn't bring the body home.'

"He stopped chopping and got sort of white.

" 'Would you stand here and see me drown?' he asked.

" 'You're dead set on dying,' I said, 'and I'll do anything in reason to oblige a friend.'

"At that he banged the axe down on the ice.

" 'If you're mean enough to do that,' he yelled at me, 'I'm damned if I'll die.'

"But it cured him," said Alderman Ferguson, in conclusion. "He never talked about committing suicide any more."

"So that happened to you," remarked Corbett, musingly, after the laugh evoked by the story had died away.

"Of course," replied Ferguson. "It's just as clear in my mind as if it had happened yesterday, and I have to laugh every time I think of it."

Darnell and Mason made no comment, but later

one of them asked Corbett if he thought the story was true.

“I know it’s true,” answered the reporter, “but it isn’t true of ‘Artful Arthur’ Ferguson. It’s the story I saddled on him five years ago.”

“And it’s been printed and told a dozen times since,” added Ryan.

“The public likes to laugh,” asserted Corbett. “If you can identify yourself with something that puts it in good humour you’ve done a good deal to establish yourself in its favour.”

“On mature reflection,” said Darnell, with a smile, “I have decided to give you permission to saddle on me all the good and harmless stories that you wish.”

“Thanks,” returned Corbett; “but I’d do it anyhow.”

CHAPTER X.

THE VERDICT OF SOCIETY

SOCIETY was uncertain how to take the candidacy of Harold Darnell. Of course, society likes to experience new sensations, for they serve to drive away the ennui of existence, and at first he was a mixture of amusement and enthusiasm. He was "our" candidate. While society is far from being confined to one ward, nevertheless he was "our" candidate wherever society gathered. If truth be told, a good many of those who were most enthusiastic did not know whether he belonged to their wards or not — and did not care. He was their representative, just the same. They laughed, but they admired. It was a joke, but it was also something more than a joke. In fact society was puzzled, and its emotions were conflicting. It gave both raillery and applause, and it was not quite certain which expressed its real sentiments. Society is always fearful of making a mistake in passing judgment on anything out of the usual line. In consequence, the safest rule seems to be to either ignore

or condemn everything that is not strictly conventional. But Darnell could not very well be ignored. Such a course would not be safe. His social position was too well established; his father was too prominent; his mother was too indispensable to the smart set. And, besides, previously the Darnells had been regarded as authorities, who always did exactly the right thing, and whose judgment was infallible. So society chose to regard him as a champion, and to evince some pride in him, although, to avoid committing itself irrevocably, it also joked.

This was at the beginning of the campaign. Later it began to dawn upon society that there was something very common about politics, and even a Darnell could not be quite forgiven for being common. He was associating with such dreadfully common people. Not only that, but he bore himself like a common man. He treated the lowliest as his equals, thus somehow bringing discredit upon society, which had accepted him as its equal. Billy Ryan was quoted as saying, "He's a whizzer!" and from down in the slums came the report that he had been acclaimed by various presumably disreputable men as "one of us." He had dropped society almost entirely, and was associating with people that society could not countenance. He had been interviewed in Casey's saloon. If it had been the wine-room of some aristocratic club, it would have

been all right — the liquor feature had nothing to do with society's displeasure — but society had a hazy conception of Casey's saloon as a place where vulgar and unsavoury politicians gathered. It had also been reported that objectionable characters slapped him familiarly on the back and called him "a good fellow;" that he cracked jokes with the *hoi polloi* and "set 'em up" for the bums; that he was becoming the boon companion of Billy Ryan, who was really dreadfully common, to say the least.

Just what society expected, society itself could not say, but it certainly was not this. That he should be popular was quite proper, but he should be popular in a dignified way, as became one of his position. There should be something of condescension in his manner. So society began to shrug its shoulders and gossip. It was not prepared to condemn him outright, but it could mildly and inferentially voice its disapproval, especially when he was not present. Society can be anything but frank and straightforward.

Miss Hadley was quick to note the change, but she said nothing. It was not for her to defend him, and she was not disposed to criticise. As a matter of fact, she was hurt and offended. Since the day she had expressed her views so strongly on a man's duty to himself and to the community, Darnell had sought no further encouragement from her, and had given

her no more of his confidence. Of course, she should have been gratified by this evidence that he had taken the lesson to heart and was showing independence and strength of character, but she was not. In theory it was all right; in practice there was something lacking. She had begun to realise how much satisfaction she had derived from the thought that she had inspired him to do something. She knew that it was her suggestion that had made him change his mind and enter the race after refusing to run. In her heart, she realised that the thing he did or undertook to do was of minor importance; it was that he should be inspired to do it by her that really counted. She would have liked to feel that she still exerted some influence, that she was helpful to him, that she was at least indirectly associated with this new departure — in brief, that he was her knight, in whom she could inspire creditable ambitions. This was directly contrary to what she had said, and at the time she had fully meant what she had said; but she was mistaken. She did not admit this in words, even to herself, but she knew it. At the same time, her pride made her resent his sudden change of demeanour. Their friendship had been of long standing, and she held that it was absurd and childish for him to let so little a matter make a break in their friendly relations. Still, it was of no moment to her, she told herself. A girl always

liked to feel that she was doing some good, that she was giving courage and strength to man — any man — but she had no direct interest in this matter. She had enough to claim her attention, anyway.

But she studied the newspapers as never before. She followed the campaign as closely as any of the political managers, and she was posted on every move that Darnell made. "Even a woman," she said, by way of excusing herself to her accusing heart, "ought to know something about local political questions." Then, as if to show the insincerity of the excuse, she entered into a spirited defence of Darnell when her father spoke slightly of him.

"Oh, I suppose he's a good enough boy in his way," her father replied, carelessly, when she spoke for him. "He's equal to the task of spending his father's money, but he'll never amount to anything."

"Isn't he showing right now that he amounts to something?" demanded the daughter.

"In the wrong way," answered Mr. Hadley. "What I hear of him in this campaign does not commend him to me. It doesn't seem to me necessary that a man should get down in the gutter, and it is usually difficult to get out."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hadley were strict Presbyterians, and their sense of propriety was seriously shocked by what they heard of Darnell. It did not seem to them possible that an upright young man

could deliberately and willingly accept such associations; and, if it were possible, they held it to be a foregone conclusion that he would be contaminated. Others might give thought to the question of social expediency, and, while disapproving, refrain from plainly showing their disapproval; but the Hadleys were independent. They could act, while others gossiped and wavered. They dared give expression to the sentiments that others felt but hesitated to openly acknowledge, and, although they were sincere, it cannot be denied that the known, but unexpressed, views of the less fearless had considerable effect. Furthermore, they had a deeper interest in the matter, for the future of their daughter was at stake. There was no engagement, but a watchful mother sees much, and what a watchful mother sees a devoted father soon learns. So there was doubt and worry. They never had been particularly enthusiastic about Darnell, although previously the reasons for their objections had been rather indefinite and they never had discouraged his attentions. He was a bright enough young fellow, but purposeless, according to Mr. Hadley. He had no serious aim in life; he lacked earnestness and persistence; he never would be known as anything except his father's heir; he would make nothing of his opportunities. Lacking a son, Mr. Hadley wanted a son-in-law in whom he could take genuine

pride; no other, he felt, could be worthy of his daughter. To Mrs. Hadley, Darnell had been somewhat more acceptable, but even she thought he lacked stability and failed to appreciate the responsibilities of his position. She took society very seriously. To be born into the "first circles" of it was like being born into the royal family of some monarchy, and it devolved upon the fortunate one to set an example of usefulness and also of austere and correct conduct. He should never forget that the eyes of the less favoured were upon him. It may be said in passing that the men in society who came up to Mrs. Hadley's standard could be counted without any serious mental strain; but that did not make her any the less anxious that her daughter's husband should be such a man.

Darnell was a gentleman in both heart and deportment, but he did not meet these requirements. He had given more attention to his profession than most young men in his position would have given, but he was not the success that Mr. Hadley thought he ought to be. He was not an idler, but it may be safely said that he would have been more devoted to his work, had his living depended upon it. At the same time, Mr. Hadley hardly gave him credit for all that he did, while Mrs. Hadley resented the levity with which he frequently discussed society. She liked him, but she was doubtful. It was evident

that he enjoyed society, but he treated it lightly, even going so far as to be decidedly satirical in some of his comments. Of course, in time he *might* gain a comprehension of his duty, but would he? Was it not more than likely that he would drift into an utterly purposeless life, socially and professionally?

The local campaign apparently came at just the right time to answer these questions. He developed unexpected energy, but his ambition apparently was not of the right kind. He did not prove himself to be the kind of a man to reflect credit on society. He seemed to take naturally — altogether too naturally — to methods, manners, and people that were, to say the least, objectionable. It was not that those whose favour he now sought were poor, but that they were uncouth and not infrequently disreputable. And he deliberately sought their level, instead of holding aloof and treating them, even though kindly, with condescending patronism. At least, that is how it seemed to Mrs. Hadley, while Mr. Hadley speculated as to the probable result. Would not the tricky and unscrupulous work their own ends with him? In truth, were they not already doing it? Reports indicated that he was in their hands, that he was submitting to their dictation. They would play upon ambition and take advantage of youthful enthusiasm, as they well knew how to do, and Mr. Hadley did not believe the young man was strong

enough to withstand them. Politics has been the moral ruin of many a man of good intentions, and Darnell certainly seemed to be galloping in the direction of temptation and contamination. Would he not find himself seriously involved before he fully realised what had happened? Would he have the strength and inclination to draw out? Would not the game, with its tangle of intrigues and its excitement and glittering successes, appeal to him?

Mr. Hadley cared little for money, except as a mere incident of success, but he did care for reputation, and, as before stated, he had strict ideas as to the proper course of conduct for a man of standing and integrity. So far, Darnell had done nothing to which he could make specific objection, but the outlook was not reassuring. Formerly he had thought that the young man would not be a success; now he feared that he might be an objectionable success. As a measure of precaution he decided to discourage any intimacy between his daughter and Darnell. They had been too much together, he thought.

"Has Mr. Darnell been here recently?" he asked, quite casually, after he had reached this conclusion.

"No," answered Miss Hadley, rather shortly.

"I am glad of it."

The girl said nothing. Her father had spoken

slightingly of Darnell on one or two other occasions of late, but never with such apparent purpose.

"I can't approve of his course at all," Mr. Hadley persisted, determined to make his wishes clear.

"You used to say that a young man should take an interest in politics," remarked the girl. She could not help coming to the defence of Darnell, when she thought him unjustly assailed. "I've heard you say that, if more of the better element gave a little time to local affairs, we would be better governed."

"But the better element should not associate itself with the worst element," returned Mr. Hadley. "There is where I find fault with Darnell. He is not pursuing the right course. I am doubtful of him. He is too much with the 'gang.'"

"Mr. Darnell will never be with the dishonest!" exclaimed Miss Hadley, hotly.

"Not in their financial dishonesty, of course," acquiesced her father, "but politically he is with them now. Unless he is very careful — more careful than he seems disposed to be — he always will be associated with them in the public mind. I do not see the necessity for becoming the boon companion of professional and 'machine' politicians; it cannot fail to have an injurious effect upon him personally and upon his reputation. At first it was a joke, but he is carrying it too far. He is becoming one of them."

"He *never* will be one of them!" asserted the girl. Somehow she was less tractable and less disposed to be confidential than ever before. There was a note of defiance in her tone, and at the same time she seemed to be displeased with herself for taking Darnell's part.

"Even so," returned Mr. Hadley, "the career upon which he has started cannot fail to make him a very unenviable husband for a young girl who is accustomed to the most considerate treatment and the purest associations. He would not seem to belong to her; he would be at the beck and call of men for whom she had the greatest contempt; she would be ashamed of his companions, if not of him; she would want to fly from the things she heard of him; he could not fail to be affected by his environment, even in his treatment of her; he would be notorious rather than noted, and the fact would be constantly forced upon her. Imagine the sufferings of a sensitive young wife in such a campaign as this, if her husband did as Darnell is doing, and, with most politicians, such conditions are continuous!"

Miss Hadley had heard something of the callers at the Darnell home, of the conferences and engagements and the hours they entailed.

"She would have no part in his life," added her father, after a pause; "she would want to have no part in such a life."

"Why do you say this to me?" asked the girl, with a calm change of front that was decidedly disconcerting.

"I thought it wise," was all he could say.

"He is nothing to me," she asserted, with unnecessary earnestness.

"Under the circumstances, I am glad of it."

"Nothing at all," she reiterated. "And I am nothing to him." Then a moment later: "You are very foolish, papa." She never had forsaken the childish "papa" for the more dignified "father," although this was no indication of a weak and willowy woman.

Mr. Hadley was thoughtful for a time after she had left him. Woman, in the variety of her moods and the contradictoriness of her methods, has a way of making man thoughtful. But, when he heard her at the piano in the next room, singing softly, he smiled cheerfully.

"It is all right," he said. "If she really cared she would be in her room, crying, now."

Mr. Hadley had the wisdom of the average man. He placed all women in one class, and judged them accordingly. He might as well have expected to correctly read all languages after mastering a single alphabet.

CHAPTER XI.

INDEPENDENCE AND INDIFFERENCE

WHILE Darnell saw little of society during the strenuous days of the campaign, it was only natural that he should learn something of its doings. Many of the more independent young men were his firm friends, and his mother, although in no sense a gossip, kept in touch with, and discussed, all social happenings. Thus he was kept advised of all that was going on — especially all that concerned Miss Hadley. The young men knew of his interest in that quarter, and his mother was far from being entirely ignorant of it.

He accepted without comment all the information given him. He could not conceal from himself that he was glad to get it, but he did not care to make this too apparent to others. He told himself that he was acting independently, solely in accordance with his own desires and sense of duty, but nevertheless he was most anxious to know what she thought of his course. He wanted her to understand that he had in him the manly independence that she had

seemed to intimate was lacking; that he could think for himself and act for himself; that he possessed courage, energy, and resourcefulness; that he needed no feminine inspiration or suggestions. He was doing this for himself, but — he wanted her to know it, and he wanted to know that she knew it. It would be some satisfaction to demonstrate that neither she nor her influence was at all necessary. It would be a greater satisfaction to know that she appreciated this and was properly distressed by it.

But to none of those that he saw had Miss Hadley made any comment upon either him or his campaign. Of course, he did not really care — certainly not; it was a mere whim, a trifling incident of life, that he should wish to learn her sentiments. He was not attempting to prove anything to her; it was quite immaterial whether she were pleased or displeased; but — well, he wished he knew that she was either one or the other.

It is strange that a young man should be so anxious to learn the views of a young woman to whom he is utterly indifferent, but, in such circumstances, young men do not reason. Darnell didn't. He simply told himself that he was indifferent, and accepted this assertion as truthful until he suddenly discovered that it was not.

This discovery came through Albert Dale. In spite of the humorous view he took of the affair at

the beginning, Dale had in time become something of an enthusiast — at least to the extent of championing Darnell at the club and calling on him occasionally to listen to stories of the campaign.

“By the way,” remarked Dale one day, “Stanley Fisher seems to be most devoted to Miss Hadley just now. The number of dances he claimed and got at the last of the Assemblies made the thing look serious. But, of course, you weren’t there.”

There was in this a flattering inference that, if he had been there, it might have been different, but Darnell made no reply.

“He’s a cad,” Dale went on, “but, for some reason, he stands high with old Hadley.”

It takes very little to make a mistake plain sometimes. These few words convinced Darnell that he had made a mistake. He *did* care for Miss Hadley’s opinion, and he *did* want her to be interested in him and his work; not only that, but he had set himself to this task very largely for her sake. Both pride and resentment might have something to do with his course, but back of it all was Miss Hadley. Whatever the immediate motive, it could by no possibility be due to any other person, for no other could have so stirred either pride or resentment.

He knew this the moment Dale had spoken. He knew it because of his sudden dislike for Fisher, to whom he had previously been most indifferent.

Fisher was a young fellow with excellent prospects, but no capital. He was energetic and diplomatic. In business he was industrious, shrewd, and not always scrupulous; in society he was equally industrious and shrewd, and even less scrupulous. He made friends that would be of value, and his treatment of others was not always that of the punctilious gentleman. In brief, he was not above a shabby trick, if it would serve his purpose, but he was wondrously clever in concealing his trickiness. Society was not his birthright, and for that reason he prized it all the more highly. To the man who is out of it, and wants to be in, society represents a great deal more than it does to the man who always has been in, and of, it. Fisher made social success one of the aims of his life, and he allied it with business success. It was all a very serious matter to him. This naturally put him in the good graces of Mrs. Hadley, while Mr. Hadley regarded him as a most promising young man. He surely would amount to something; the progress he already had made showed that he had the right stuff in him. In truth, Fisher had the art — and it is an art — of impressing others with his worth. He was not deeply designing, but he could flatter tactfully, and showed equal tact in inferentially discrediting others whenever such a course seemed to his advantage. Such men are not uncommon, but fortu-

nately only a few of them gain lasting success by these methods. Still, there are some who do it.

Fisher at this time made the most of his opportunities, and the conditions were favourable. Miss Hadley was in a resigned and dutiful mood. She had decided to be sensible — not necessarily worldly, but just sensible. Romance really had no place in this matter-of-fact age; it was much more important that one should respect than that one should love. And why should she not accept the attentions of Stanley Fisher? Her mother admired him, and her father approved; and surely they had wisdom and a deep interest in her welfare. Besides, she liked him. He was entertaining and most deferential. She did not go so far as to decide, even in her own reflections, whether she would accept him if he proposed, but there seemed to be no reason why she should not. She was indifferent, or thought she was; but she took care that this indifference should not be apparent. With the exception of an occasional moodiness, she was as vivacious as ever.

Mr. Hadley was greatly pleased with the course of events, and as time passed his pleasure increased. He was constantly hearing things about Darnell that did not meet his entire approval. The fact that practically all these reports came, either directly or indirectly, through Fisher did not impress itself upon him sufficiently to seem significant. Fisher brought

them out only incidentally, as something that might be amusing.

"Darnell," he would say, "is certainly a wonder! It is astonishing how a fellow of his previous associations can make himself so popular with the slum element! Did you see how they took to him at that rally in the First last night?"

Or perhaps he would produce a copy of some paper, with the remark: "There's an awfully good story about Darnell. Did you see it?"

The story would be one that would make Mr. Hadley frown and shake his head. No one knew better than Fisher the kind of a story that would be antagonistic to Mr. Hadley's idea of the fitness of things. For instance, Fisher with great persistence showed — always good-naturedly, of course — how Darnell had injected a large element of humour into the campaign, with the result that Mr. Hadley became more and more impressed with the conviction that the young man was playing the principal part in a burlesque. It was all done very ingeniously, but somehow it seemed to become apparent that the professional politicians either were making a fool of him or were in a position to claim him as their own and do with him as they wished. It is wonderful how much of disparagement can be artistically concealed in words of apparent indorsement and praise! Even Miss Hadley felt the effect of it, and was

troubled, even while she doubted and told herself it was a matter of no moment to her, anyway. But she still read the papers and kept her own counsel.

Something of all this came to Darnell. Other reports followed the first brought by Dale, and they were most disquieting. Fisher was unquestionably pressing his suit with unusual vigour. As a real estate broker, he had some business dealings with Mr. Hadley, and this gave him additional opportunities, which he did not neglect.

"Somehow," laughed Dale, "I think he prefers to transact his business with Hadley at the house, and I'll bet the old man never had such a conscientious agent for any other property he put on the market."

Then one day the news came which Darnell had feared would come, although it seemed preposterous that it should come so soon. Still, Fisher had been a regular caller at the Hadleys long before the local campaign opened, and had merely been somewhat more devotedly persistent in his attentions since, so why should it seem preposterous? For no reason in the world, except that Darnell had once expected a very different announcement to be made in time.

"I don't believe it," he said, when Dale told him that Fisher and Miss Hadley were engaged to be married. He did believe it, but there was some satisfaction in refusing to admit it.

"I have it from Fisher himself," returned Dale. "He had just finished 'breaking the news to papa' at the club when I saw him, and had secured the old gentleman's blessing. Naturally, he was jubilant, or perhaps he wouldn't have made me his first confidant. He knows I am a friend of yours."

"Possibly," suggested Darnell, "I am just the one he wants the news to reach early. If he thought I was particularly interested, that would be quite natural."

"There were others who thought you were particularly interested," remarked Dale. "What was the trouble?"

"There was no trouble," answered Darnell, carelessly; "no trouble at all; no chance for any trouble."

As Dale left, he said to himself, "That's a lie, and I know it." Darnell also knew it, and when he was alone his face was proof of it.

He was deep in a reverie when Billy Ryan was announced, but he roused himself instantly.

"Thank Heaven for the campaign!" he exclaimed, "and the hotter it is the better I'll like it!"

He was more enthusiastic, brilliant, and witty that night than ever before.

CHAPTER XII.

DEFIANCE

BOB HOWE brought the news to the Old Man that Mason intended to sign the Citizens' Safety League pledge. What the Old Man said in the excitement of the moment need not be repeated here. After he had cooled off a little, his remarks were not quite so objectionably explosive.

Usually deliberate and slow of speech, the Old Man was nevertheless only human, and under stress of circumstances could become temporarily excited. The Citizens' Safety League was not necessarily a subject to excite him, although it occasioned a good deal of worry, but in some combinations it was sufficiently disturbing to shock him into a display of temper. This was one of the combinations. O'Hara already was pledged, and Mason was to have signed the pledge when O'Hara agreed to withdraw in his favour to defeat Baxter, but the exciting and unexpected developments that retired Baxter and left both Mason and O'Hara in the field had so disarranged all plans that the pledge

had been, for the time, ignored. Mason's reputation and standing were such that it seemed unnecessary to bind him specifically to the non-political party of municipal reform, but it was the rule of the Citizens' Safety League to take nothing for granted. Every candidate who received its support was expected to sign a certain agreement or pledge that was antagonistic to gang and boodle methods of doing business. Some had been known to sign and then prove recreant, but no one ever had an opportunity to do this more than once, and there were not many who did it at all. In most wards where the gang had any sort of a chance, it was better and easier to refuse to sign, and the Old Man had hoped to get Mason through unpledged. While his nomination had been forced, and it was a question as to just how tractable he would be under the most favourable circumstances, it was practically a foregone conclusion that he could not be controlled at all if he committed himself in advance in this detailed way. It was necessary that a chance should be left open to "reach" him after election, as it could not be done before. There are many ways of "reaching" even a good man, and Ned Bell was familiar with them all.

"If he ever signs, there'll be a revolt," said the Old Man, when he had finished his more fiery expressions. "It's been hard to hold some of the

boys in line, as it is. Bayler and Pepper are both disgruntled; Coakley made a roar about him; so did Hogan. The pledge is not so much to me personally, but I've got to hold them all in line for more important things, and I can't do it if he ties himself up."

"That's right," returned Howe. "Even *you* can ask too much of the boys. They've got their own game to play."

The Old Man scowled, but did not resent this intimation that he was not all-powerful. He knew that no man in politics is that, however much he may like to think he is. The strength of the political "boss" rests on the alliances he is able to make, and he maintains his sway by making judicious concessions. He must help others to be helped himself; he must adopt a policy of reciprocity with other "bosses," if he would gain anything outside his own little reservation; and he must not curtail the opportunities of the faithful ones in it, if he would retain his supremacy there. He may be autocratic in many ways, but when he becomes too autocratic the end of his rule is approaching.

The Old Man knew just about how far he could go.

"I believe you'd balk yourself," he said.

"Well," admitted Howe, diplomatically, "I'd rather see O'Hara in the Council, if Mason signs

that pledge. We wouldn't be responsible for him, and so we could hold our ward organisation together better. Dissatisfaction with O'Hara would help us; dissatisfaction with Mason would do the other thing."

"Are you sure that he hasn't signed already?"

"I'm sure that he hadn't up to last night, for Norris asked him to come to the League headquarters for that purpose, and Billy Ryan headed him off."

"Why doesn't Ryan bring him here?" demanded the Old Man.

"He intends to," answered Howe. "He had a hot argument with him last night, and the only promise he could get from him was that he would see you before signing."

The Old Man reviewed the whole situation hastily in his mind, giving thought to every necessity and every possibility.

"I'll stop it," he said at last, with decision.

"It's not going to be dead easy," remarked Howe. "He's bull-headed in some ways. I guess you know that."

"Leave it to me," retorted the Old Man, with calm confidence, and Howe left, well satisfied. The Old Man was resourceful, and could be forceful. He was not often thwarted in important matters. This was important, and his tone indicated that he

not only was determined, but also satisfied that he had solved the problem. One could tell a great deal from the Old Man's tone.

In this instance, however, he made a miscalculation at the very beginning. He had expected Ryan to have sense enough to bring Mason to the Democratic Club for the interview alone, and in this he was disappointed. Ryan had the requisite sense, but not the ability. Darnell was his immediate charge, Darnell had been present when the subject of the pledge came up, and Darnell insisted upon accompanying Mason. They were now warm friends, and both knew that there was trouble ahead.

So the Old Man did not have Mason at such a disadvantage as he had expected. According to his calculations, it should have been two to one — himself and Ryan to bring the young man to terms. Darnell was a disturbing element under the circumstances. But Mason wanted Darnell, and Darnell was not one to shirk responsibility or dodge a row, especially at that time.

The Old Man opened the interview.

"Mason," he said, "I understand you intend to sign the Citizens' Safety League pledge."

"I do," asserted Mason.

"It will kill you in that ward," said the Old Man.

"Why?" demanded Mason. "O'Hara has done

it, and you were afraid to run Baxter against O'Hara. I agreed to do it when it was planned to make me an independent candidate, and you were afraid to run Baxter against me."

There was an aggressiveness in this that was disturbing. Mason's previous interview with Ryan on the same subject had put him in a combative mood.

"The circumstances are different," urged the Old Man.

"I don't see how," replied Mason. "I am pledging myself to do nothing that I do not intend to do anyway."

"Of course, of course," acquiesced the Old Man, "but written pledges are very inconvenient things to have lying around."

"I have made the same promises in my speeches," argued Mason.

"Oh, everybody does that," returned the Old Man, lightly.

"But I meant what I said," insisted Mason.

The Old Man was now convinced that he had a stubborn fight on hand. He glanced anxiously at Darnell, and was glad to note that the latter, although following every word closely, showed no disposition to break into the conversation. Still, his presence, and the other circumstances of the case, made conciliation and diplomacy necessary,

or at least advisable. Ryan, who had so often heard his chief give peremptory orders to men of greater strength and importance, was surprised at this deference. But Ryan was not as good a judge of men, methods, or conditions as his chief. He was superficially clever, but not deep.

"It is a matter of expediency," argued the Old Man. "Politically, we know the people of that ward better than you do, and Billy Ryan can tell you that that pledge will do you a great deal of harm where you are strong now."

"I told you last night," put in Ryan, "that a good many of our people won't stand for it. I'm not talking of the rank and file, but of the leaders. Bob Howe will kick over the traces to a certainty."

"He said as much to me less than an hour ago," added the Old Man, "and there are others that I can't hold in line. Now, I'm talking frankly to you, as man to man. I can do as much as anybody, but there are some things no one can do. I forced your nomination at the last minute, and I have forced some mighty balky people to do their share of the work since; but, if you sign that pledge, I'll have to throw up my hands. And, besides, it isn't fair to me. I have accepted you without any pledge, and you have no right to give one to anybody else."

"If you asked for a pledge that I could con-

scientiously give, I would give it to you as readily as to any one else," said Mason.

"I only ask that you shall give no pledge at all," persisted the Old Man.

"And there certainly is nothing dishonourable in that," argued Ryan.

For a moment Mason was undecided. He could see no reason why he should not give a pledge that was entirely in accord with his intentions, but if it would help matters any to withhold it, why not do so? It could in no way affect his actions in the Council. The Old Man was asking only that he should be entirely unpledged, and the Old Man was entitled to some consideration. He could not quite grasp the underlying motive, but, after all, the main thing was to reach the Council without any objectionable entanglements or alliances. There could be no harm in remaining absolutely free in every particular.

His thoughts were running in this channel when Darnell suddenly remarked that he had signed that pledge without any objection being made.

"The Twenty-fourth and the Eighth are different wards, and the people take different views of things," replied the Old Man; but his face showed that the complication he feared had crept in.

"Are certain people in the Eighth to be held in line for Mason on the supposition that, if he

refuses to sign, he is at heart opposed to the principles involved?" asked Darnell, and the question put the matter before Mason in a new light. There was trickery in it — of exactly what nature he could not say, but it was there.

"I'm going to sign it," he announced, before the Old Man could reply. "I'll not be a party to any subterfuge. I don't want the support of any man who expects me to do what I am not going to do, and gives me his support for that reason. I'm going to be straightforward, anyhow."

"You'll lose," said Ryan.

"You can't be the candidate of both the Safety League and the Democratic party," asserted the Old Man, and now there was something that savoured of a threat in his tone. He was being pushed to his last resort. "This is no fusion campaign," he went on. "You were nominated by the Democrats, and they expect you to be unfalteringly true to them. If you tie yourself up with the Safety League, they don't want you, and they won't have you. They'll turn in to beat you, and they'll do it good and plenty. I'll help them myself. Do you think you're a big enough man to beat me and Bob Howe and Pepper and all the rest of the regular organisation in that ward?"

This seemed to be a fair statement of the case, and a most disheartening one, also. It brought to

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Mason's mental vision a picture that was not pleasing, for he had now seen something of practical politics, and he did not flatter himself that his personal popularity could carry him through in the face of such organised opposition as was threatened. But he felt that an effort was being made to force him into a humiliating, and possibly false, position, and it angered him. What were they trying to do with him that they dared not attempt to do with Darnell?

"I'm going to sign," he repeated, doggedly.

Darnell nodded his head approvingly, but said nothing.

"Then you'll have to make the fight alone from now on," the Old Man announced, in a tone of disgust and disappointment.

"I'll do it," said Mason.

"Now, look here, Mason!" broke in Billy Ryan. "I've been your friend in this campaign, and you ought to be willing to listen to reason. You've got the chance of a lifetime right now, if you'll only stand on your dignity and keep still. It's your play to do the high and mighty with the Safety League. 'I'll sign no humiliating pledge,' is the thing for you to say. Just tell them that your record as a man is your pledge, and your neighbours and the people who do business with you can tell them what that is. That lets you out nicely, for you've got the

record to back it in your ward, and you won't lose twenty votes. The League can't bring a thing against you except your refusal, which amounts to nothing in view of your high standing. But, if you sign, Mason, you're a goner. The boys will simply stick the knife into you every chance they get, and Bob Howe and Tom Lewis will make chances for them, with Pepper helping out. They'll put O'Hara in, if it's only to turn you down."

"I'd rather go to honourable defeat than to dishonourable victory," returned Mason. "There's nothing in that pledge that I ought not to sign; as an independent I promised to sign it, and as a Democrat I'll keep that promise. I confess I don't know why you object, and I don't care. I'm going on record plainly — as Darnell has done."

The Old Man gave a scowling glance in the direction of Darnell, as if he would say, "If you had only kept away I could have put this thing through." Then he turned to Ryan and spoke with the cold deliberateness of the autocrat.

"Tell Howe," he said, "that he's released from his pledge in the Eighth, and can do as he pleases; and let Pepper know that we have no candidate there, so he can work up any kind of a combination he likes. In a word, tip it off that it's a free-for-all, and we don't give a damn for anything except the city ticket. Of course, for mayor and the other

city officers we must have the usual majority, but for alderman there's no Democratic candidate — only a Republican and an independent, and they can take their choice."

Mason was very white. He did not conceal from himself that this meant a great deal to him, for he practically despaired of election, and the campaign already had cost him something — not much, perhaps, for another man, but considerable for him. And defeat would be a bitter disappointment to the little woman at home.

He glanced at Darnell, to see how the latter regarded his determination, but Darnell apparently had eyes only for the Old Man and Ryan. He was leaning over the little table, on which both his arms rested, and there was a strange glitter in his eyes as he watched them.

"You will withdraw from the Eighth entirely," the Old Man went on, still addressing Ryan. "There will be others to look after the city ticket there, but, so far as our people are concerned, Mason will be eliminated from the campaign."

"Oh, no, he won't," interrupted Darnell. He spoke very quietly, making no change in his position, but there was determination in his tone, and the Old Man turned to meet his gaze. "My part of the campaign," continued Darnell, "will be continued just as heretofore."

"Don't be a fool, Darnell!" exclaimed Ryan.

"I don't think I am the one who is doing the foolish thing," returned Darnell.

"You'll wreck your own chances without helping him," said the Old Man, when he had recovered from his astonishment.

"I'm willing to risk it," retorted Darnell.

"I can't permit it," broke in Mason, deeply touched by this evidence of friendship. "It would be a sacrifice —"

"You keep still," interrupted Darnell. "You've had your chance, and it's my turn. The automobile campaign will go on exactly as before."

The Old Man laughed.

"Now, what do you think of that!" he exclaimed. "A declaration of independence by a political child! Why, Darnell," addressing the young man directly, "you'll simply force us to drop you, too."

In his earnestness Darnell rose and leaned over the table toward the Old Man.

"Mr. Bell," he said, "you won't drop me because you can't; it would make too much talk of a disagreeable kind, and you know it. You've made too much of a feature of me for that. You're afraid to oppose me openly; you're afraid to even give the appearance of withdrawing your support."

There was so much of truth in this that the Old Man did not care to argue the point.

"I don't want to oppose you at all," he returned, "and, as long as you keep out of the Eighth, you'll have the hottest kind of support."

"Is that a threat?" asked Darnell.

The Old Man laughed uneasily.

"Better call it a promise," he suggested. "We'll be with you in your own ward. You can't expect to dictate to us how we shall run the campaign elsewhere."

"And you can't dictate to me," returned Darnell. "I like to see fair play, and Mason isn't getting it. I like to think, too, that no matter of expediency will make me false to a friend, even in politics."

"Bell is your friend," urged Ryan.

"When it serves his purpose to be," retorted Darnell. "He wouldn't stand by me one minute, if he could gain anything by forsaking or opposing me. His is the friendship of convenience or utility."

"Stop that!" cried the Old Man, who felt this shaft so keenly that it resulted in a momentary — but only momentary — display of temper. "I can overlook a good deal in a hot-headed boy, but I can't stand everything. And it might just as well be understood now that I am running this campaign. The matter stands right here, Darnell: If you go into the Eighth, we drop you at the ward boundaries; as long as you stick to the Twenty-fourth, we're back of you. That's final."

“ In that case,” exclaimed Darnell, angrily, as he picked up his hat, “ I serve notice on you now that I’ll finish out this campaign — every minute of it — in the Eighth Ward.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEEP-RED ROSE

MASON endeavoured to dissuade Darnell, but Darnell was not to be dissuaded. In truth, Darnell was in a humour to be rather pleased with the course events had taken. He was in a combative mood; he wanted excitement; he had a feeling of recklessness that made the prospect of trouble rather enjoyable.

"You'd better keep out of my fight," urged Mason. "There isn't one chance in a thousand that I can win, but, if you stick to your own ward, you're practically certain to pull through."

"I don't much care whether I win or not," returned Darnell, "but I do care about your success. With me it's only a whim; with you it's a more serious matter. Besides, I wouldn't miss the fun for anything. We may not win — probably we won't — in your ward, but I'd rather worry the Old Man there than win in my own. I just want to give him a whirl that he'll remember."

Both were satisfied that Mason had done exactly

right in insisting upon signing the League pledge, but neither was quite sure what object the Old Man had in view in seeking to prevent it. They lacked the political experience that would make it clear. But, in any event, they were determined to continue the fight along the lines now so well defined; and it was well that Darnell decided to stick to Mason. Darnell had the enthusiasm and resourcefulness that was necessary. Mason could be patiently persistent, but he lacked the wit and the spirit to put life into a campaign. Even when most determined to continue, he was disposed to take a gloomy view of the situation, and to let this view affect him outwardly.

"I ought never to have got into politics," he told his wife. "I'm not clever enough for it. I thought it was like a business, but I find there are tricks and traps at every turn, and the best intentions in the world may not prevent a fellow from involving himself in some way. I'm in constant fear of finding myself in some intrigue, without knowing how it happened. The whole thing is a network of deceit and subterfuge, and not one proposition in twenty is what it seems to be on its face."

"It's too bad you had to break with Mr. Bell and the rest of those people," returned Mrs. Mason, dolefully.

"But I had to do it," he urged.

"Of course you did," she admitted, with a sigh, "and I wouldn't have had you do anything else for the world, but it's going to be awfully hard, Joe, if you lose now. It seems as if a good, strong, honest man like you ought to win."

"To you, yes," he said, "but, do you know, little woman, Darnell would be a better man to run in this ward? He seems to understand the crowds, and I don't. I have friends, but I don't seem to attract them all, as he does. I guess I must lack magnetism."

Now, strangely enough, this was right in line with the verdict over in the Twenty-fourth Ward. The exact reasons for Darnell's sudden desertion of his own ward to make a campaign in the Eighth were not known, but there were rumours, and more than one had suggested that he would make an ideal candidate for Mason's ward. There was an insinuation in this that was not pleasing, although the idea was generally advanced in rather a joking way. As a matter of fact, society was still undecided as to how it ought to take Darnell, but it was getting very close to the point of turning from him as resolutely as the position of his parents would permit.

Under these circumstances, Stanley Fisher lost some of his caution and became more open in his hostility. He even ventured upon rather sharp crit-

icism of Darnell's course in devoting his entire attention to the election of "a slum alderman." He was unwise in this, and especially unwise in using that particular term.

"But," he said, with one of his disagreeable laughs, "we must at least give him credit for knowing where he is most appreciated."

"Mr. Darnell seems to have no friends left," commented Miss Hadley, carelessly. Miss Hadley was arranging a large bunch of roses in a vase, for the Hadleys had a fine, although small, conservatory.

"Except in the Eighth," corrected Fisher. "He has even abandoned his friends in the other slum wards."

"I wasn't thinking of the slums or of his political friends," remarked Miss Hadley, quietly. "It only occurred to me that I had heard little except criticism or ridicule of him recently."

"He has brought it on himself," asserted Fisher. "For this absurd ambition of his he has forfeited much, and probably will lose more. But it's his own choice."

Miss Hadley made no reply, apparently being more interested in the flowers than in the subject of conversation.

"May I have that?" asked Fisher, as she withdrew from the bunch a perfect rose of such a pecul-

iar shade of deep red that it seemed to be entirely distinct from all the others.

"Not that one," she answered. "That is a rare kind, to which I have been giving my personal attention. I don't think you could find another like it in the city. But you can have this."

She took one at random from the vase and pinned it to the lapel of his coat.

"I am something of a floriculturist," she added, "and the deep-red rose has been both my pride and my worry."

"For that reason," he urged, "I would prize it all the more."

"And for the same reason," she answered, with a smile, "I am not ready to part with it."

However, there was satisfaction in having any rose from her hands, and Fisher made the best of it. Of course, it would have been more flattering if she had given him the one she prized most highly, but doubtless she had reasons for retaining it that in no way affected or concerned him. He was content — until he met Darnell the following day.

Fisher lived at the club that Darnell frequented. Fisher could be depended upon to live wherever he would come in contact with those who could be most serviceable to him. He had first made Darnell's acquaintance at the club, but of late they had

seldom met. Darnell had not had as much time as usual for his club, and the two were not congenial, anyway. But they were scrupulously polite to each other.

Fisher made some incidental and congratulatory reference to the brilliancy and vigour of the campaign, and then a flower in the buttonhole of Darnell's coat caught his eye. It was a rose—the rose, in fact.

“A tribute from an unknown admirer,” laughed Darnell, noting the direction of Fisher's glance. “All sorts of strange things happen in politics. This was left at the house for me, with a card on which was inscribed the single word, ‘Encouragement.’ But it seems to trouble you.”

“Oh, no,” answered Fisher. “It held my attention for a minute, because I thought I recognised it. The shade is unusual, you know.”

“I hadn't noticed it, but, if so, perhaps you can tell me where you have seen it before.”

“I think Miss Dale was wearing it last evening,” said Fisher.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONFERENCE AT CASEY'S

DARNELL and Mason would have felt much more encouraged, if they could have heard the comments in some other quarters. Ryan had withdrawn in obedience to the Old Man's wishes, but Corbett, the reporter, was still with them, and for a few days following the declaration of independence at the Democratic Club they made things hum in the Eighth Ward. Darnell continued to tickle the fancy of the crowd, and they laughed and cheered and followed his automobile from hall to hall.

"I've heard ye say," remarked Jim Casey to Ryan, "that th' Ol' Man is a bir-rd, but they do be tellin' me this felly Darnell is wan iv th' finest wing-shots that iver handled a gun."

"He's a fool," said Ryan, "but he's making a nasty fight for Mason, and he could have had everything his own way, if he had only dropped Mason."

"Iv coorse," admitted Casey. "Ye see, ye made a mishtake."

"How?"

"Ye wint out afther a politician an' ye got a man," answered Casey. "I tell ye frankly," he went on, "I thought ye was gettin' th' kind iv a man ye wanted, but I can see now that he'll niver do f'r ye."

"That's right, Jim," acquiesced Ryan.

"F'r sure it's right," said Casey, with confidence; "an' why? F'r because th' lad has a mind iv his own, with idees an' opinions an' all thim onnicissary an' annoyin' things. Ye're niver lukkin' f'r a big man, but only f'r a shmall wan that ye can make to luk big. Ye make me think iv a felly that was wanst guv'nor iv this great Shtate an' that put a little shrimp in a fine, showy place he had f'r to fill.

"'How did it happen?' says ivery wan.

"'Easy,' says a man who knows. 'Ye see, 'tis th' custom f'r th' guv'nor to put a felly in that office that's shmall an' of liss account than himsilf, an' there's only wan iv that kind in th' whole Shtate.'

"I'm thinkin'," Casey added, "ye were afther something like that whin ye got Darnell an' Mason."

"You talk too much, Jim," exclaimed Ryan, rather sharply.

"Oh, ye needn't worry," retorted Casey. "They won't last. Anny wan who has opinions an' is fool

enough to tell what they are, niver does. But, now an' thin, 'tis inj'yable seein' a new lad puttin' th' razzle-dazzle into th' shchemes iv th' big fellies."

It would be absurd to lose one's temper with Jim Casey, so Ryan laughed this off, and then suggested that Casey did not seem to think very much of the governor in question.

"Well, I tell ye how that is," returned Casey. "A Congressman was in here wanst — I'll not give ye his name, f'r it might make throuble; but he sized him up to suit me. ' 'Twas a sorry day f'r this Shtate,' he says, 'whin th' father iv that guv'nor married.' Now, go back in th' little room an' think that over, while I'm bringin' ye a dhrink. 'Tis worth gettin' it shtraight in ye-er head, an' it tuk me two days to get th' r-rights iv it."

Ryan followed Casey's advice to the extent of retiring to the back room, where he was later joined by Bob Howe, Senator Pepper, Alderman Bayler, and Tom Lewis. They met by appointment.

The question that Ryan put was terse, but readily understood.

"How about it?" he asked.

"Oh, Mason is practically out of it," answered Howe. "There's a good deal of shouting, but it's nothing but shouting, and most of it is for Darnell, anyhow. He's spectacular, and he catches them."

"Darnell's all right in some ways, if he is a

fool politically," said Ryan. "I like him, and I want to tell you right now he's got more of a pull with the crowd than you give him credit for. I know, because I've been with him. If you don't watch out, he'll yank Mason through in the Eighth while you're not looking. He'll get some votes that you think you have all tied up in packages, and he'll take some from O'Hara, too. You can down Mason alone, and you can down them both, so far as the Eighth is concerned, but you can't do it, if you go to sleep. Just as sure as you get it in your nut that you've got a cinch, you'll wake up with a surprise party on hand."

"That's my idea," put in Senator Pepper. "It won't do to take any chances or give them any rope."

"What does the Old Man think about it?" asked Bayler.

"The Old Man," said Ryan, "has cut the Eighth out. He has turned it over to you fellows, and it's your own funeral if you get the worst of it. He expects you to keep the organisation intact, and that's all."

"How about the Twenty-fourth?" asked Howe.

"That doesn't concern you," retorted Ryan. "That's in my own district, and I'm putting in some quiet licks for Darnell there. He'll get some votes that nobody looks for. I tell you, he's the

kind of a whizzer that suits me, and the Old Man is willing. But it's different in the Eighth."

"Well," said Howe, reflectively, "Tom thinks he has a little scheme framed up there that will give us a chance to contest the election, if Mason wins. I haven't asked about the details, for I'm just as well satisfied not to know them; but there are ways of throwing doubt on a result, if a fellow goes at the job soon enough. Then we have canvassed the ward pretty thoroughly, and know where votes are needed and where they can be worked in with the least trouble. I think Tom has some names on the registration books in certain precincts that can be used in a pinch — not very many, but some. The Safety League got on to a lot last fall, but these went through then, and I guess they'll go through again."

Tom Lewis nodded his affirmation of this.

"There'll be grounds for a fraud charge, if we have to use it," he said, "and there are dummies in the registration that stood the test in the last State election."

"Risky business," commented Ryan. "That boy Darnell is new, but don't you ever think he's dull, and any time you see him passing a quiet word to Norris of the Safety League, just get ready to dodge. It wouldn't surprise me if he got next to somebody out there and had a few things tipped off to him

that Norris could use. I tell you he makes friends where you don't expect it."

"Some of the boys don't like O'Hara any better than they do Mason," suggested Pepper. "And I guess some don't like him so well. Mason has put some people on their feet out there, and the little woman at home never forgets that, if her husband does. If he had Darnell's head, he'd have almost a cinch."

"He's got Darnell's head," said Ryan.

"Not on his own shoulders," asserted Pepper, "and that makes a difference. But they certainly have got me where I don't know just what's coming. I think we're giving them too much rope for safety."

He looked at Howe as he said this, and, after a thoughtful pause, Howe turned to Lewis.

"Tom," he said, "those boys have been having it so easy that they've got a false idea of their popularity. They ought to travel the rocky road for a bit."

"They'll travel it," said Lewis, emphatically. "You know, I wanted you to turn me loose before."

As they emerged from the back room, Jim Casey took his cigar from his mouth long enough to ask, "Have ye been makin' a Prisident, or only puttin' some more min to wor-rk in th' wather-pipe extin-sion departmint?"

So far as politicians were concerned, Jim Casey's bump of respect was an indentation. Even a saloon-keeper, if he have no political aspirations himself, can have a certain measure of contempt for the local government that is largely administered from behind the whiskey barrels.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RESULT OF THE CONFERENCE

THE night after the conference at Casey's, Darnell, Mason, and Corbett made their customary invasion of the Eighth Ward, all unmindful of the trouble in store for them. Corbett was the only one of the three who was at all surprised by the apparent placidity of the Eighth Ward campaign. There was enthusiasm and noise, but no trouble, barring an occasional interruption that was sometimes disconcerting, but more frequently only provocative of a witty retort from Darnell. To Darnell and Mason this seemed to be just what was to be expected, but Corbett had more practical wisdom. He knew that defiance of the "gang" in that ward ordinarily meant trouble. No man's popularity could be sufficient to prevent it, for the leaders had practically absolute control over some precincts, and anything that threatened their supremacy was resented by the rank and file who looked to them for favours. Personal popularity might do much; under favourable conditions it might even carry

the ward as a whole; but it could not reach the heart of the ward organisation.

"Why, you're having an easier time than O'Hara," remarked Corbett, "and O'Hara ought not to be nearly so objectionable, for he didn't split with the 'machine' after getting the nomination. He's doing just what was expected of him, and he's had some disagreeable experiences at that. I don't see what's holding them. I was looking for trouble, and so was McAuley, the managing editor.

"'Corbett,' he said to me, when he heard of the split, 'while you're resting you might take a run out into the Eighth and get killed, along with Darnell and Mason. It will make a great story.'

"'Who'll write it?' I asked.

"'I'll have a man in the crowd,' he told me, 'and, if you have any dying words you'd like to have worked in, you might write them out and leave them in the office. I'll play you up in great shape.'

"'But suppose I'm only hurt some?' I suggested. 'How about the hospital expenses?'

"'I give you credit,' he said, 'for being too good a newspaper-man to spoil a story by sneaking out of a heroic death in discharge of your duty. I tell you, Corbett, you'll never be as good a reporter as I'll make you out, if you do this thing right.'

"That's the kind of an enthusiast McAuley is.

Why, when I showed up the first night, he just looked at me in disgust, and said, 'You back! What in thunder do you mean by wasting the time of that man I had in the crowd?'

"And when I started out to join you the next day, he called me in and told me in his pointed way not to worry about the office, for he had too many reporters, anyway."

"Well, both you and McAuley ought to be willing to admit that you don't know this ward as well as you thought you did," laughed Darnell. "They like us over here — not well enough to elect Mason, with both the 'machine' and O'Hara against him, perhaps, but too well to hurt us. And I'm beginning to think that Mason will pull through."

"He'll have to take a lot of votes from O'Hara to do it," asserted Corbett. "He'll get the independent Democrats, of course, and some others, but don't forget that there's a 'machine' here that works backward or forward or crisscross when Bob Howe gets his hand on the lever. I think," he added, as they drew up to a hall, in front of which a crowd was gathered, "that he's got his hand on it now."

Both Darnell and Mason noticed that there was jeering as well as cheering. Jeering had not been entirely unknown before, but it never had been so apparent as it was now. There certainly was an element of the crowd that was hostile.

"Never mind," said Darnell. "We'll have them in line shortly."

He sprang from the automobile and pushed his way through the crowd, followed by the other two. From various quarters came mocking cries and taunts, although it was evident that a part of the assemblage was friendly. But friendship in a crowd is usually passive, while antagonism is active. Besides, once started, bantering is infectious.

"Way fer the golf man an' his two caddies!" some one shouted.

"Aw, they're aldermen — nit!" retorted another.

"Let 'em alone!" cried an aggressive, but unknown friend.

"Don't bother the ping-pong man!"

"Naw! He's a boss! He's runnin' the campaign!"

"He's goin' to be mayor!"

"Evenin', Guv'nor!"

"We'll be steppin' on velvet in the city hall!"

These and other gibes assailed them from all sides, but they pushed on, only to find the doors to the hall closed and the proprietor leaning idly against a doorpost.

"What's the matter?" demanded Darnell.

"Can't have the hall to-night," answered the proprietor, at which the crowd jeered and yelled lustily.

"Back up," cautioned Corbett, in a whisper. "Howe's hand is on the lever sure, and things are framed up for trouble."

"I intend to have fair play!" retorted Darnell, hotly.

"You can't get it," said Corbett.

"You're up against the real thing now!" hooted the crowd.

"Give the boys a show!" protested a few voices.

"I paid for this hall," insisted Darnell. Since the break with the Old Man, Darnell had put more money into campaign expenses than even Mason knew, although the latter had contributed enough to add considerably to an indebtedness created when he paid his campaign assessment. They had to rent their own halls, for they were not allowed to speak where the other candidates on the city ticket appeared.

"You can have your money back," said the proprietor, "but you can't have the hall."

"It's outrageous!" declared Darnell.

"A bloomin' shame!" echoed the crowd, tantalisingly.

"Bob Howe and his gang!" exclaimed Corbett, sententiously. "This man can't help himself. He's afraid to do anything else."

Corbett understood the situation. Howe, or some one representing him, had insured the man against

loss by advancing the amount of the rental paid, and insisted that the hall must be his — to open or close, as he saw fit. A refusal would have meant trouble and possibly loss of future business, especially for the saloon annex. Mason did not quite understand, but he saw that the crowd was menacing, and he instinctively braced himself for a row. He was more resourceful in deeds than in words. But Darnell was temporarily blinded by his anger. For the moment the only thing he properly appreciated was that they were the victims of a shabby trick.

It is probable that no violence was intended at this time. The campaign was to be blocked, and the tide turned; the hostility was to be made evident in the expectation that the antagonism would grow, for such a movement gathers force rapidly. It would encourage the opponents of Mason and discourage his friends; it would send the lukewarm and those who dislike to be identified with a losing cause to O'Hara; it would convince many that a vote for Mason would be a vote wasted. But, if this were the plan, it was sadly disarranged by the sight of money passing from the proprietor of the hall to Darnell. Money is a disturbing factor, especially in such a crowd.

Darnell was principally interested in telling the man what he thought of him and his conduct, as the rental price was counted out, but Corbett saw

enough to lead him to say to Mason, with grim humour, "I hope there's an ambulance handy." Then he pushed back a fellow who was trying to crowd past him.

"Who you shoving?" demanded the rowdy.

"Hit him!" some one yelled.

As Darnell turned to learn the cause of the trouble, a grab was made for the money he held in his hand, and at almost the same moment Mason went into action. He caught the man who got the money, but, before he could make the latter give up, he received a stinging blow on the side of the head. Corbett instantly planted his fist in the face of the man who had struck Mason, and a fight that was little less than a riot was on.

"Keep together!" yelled Corbett.

Instinctively, the three started for the automobile, but there seemed to be small chance of reaching it. The crowd pressed in so closely that it was almost impossible to strike a good blow, but some of those in the front rank suffered, although the three got much the worst of it. As they got away from the building, the mob closed in behind, and Darnell turned to protect the other two from assaults from that direction. So long as he could keep them at arm's length, he was reasonably well off, but, when they closed in, fists shot through between the heads

of the foremost ones, and it was impossible to escape these unexpected blows. Then there was a man with a crook cane, who reached over and succeeded in striking him several times on the head, although, fortunately, the circumstances made it impossible to put much force in these blows.

Fighting desperately, they had covered more than half the distance to the automobile, when Darnell felt something catch his leg and saw the man with the crook cane, now just behind the foremost of the assailants, give a vicious yank. With a cry for help, Darnell went down, while those nearest attacked him with both fists and feet. Mason and Corbett turned instantly. Mason had been fighting doggedly, but now he was like a wild man. His stockiness and strength made him especially formidable, and he could give a short blow that had almost the force of a swinging one dealt by another. Twice he and Corbett cleared a small space, but before Darnell could get on his feet the crowd closed in again. Then — how or when it began he never knew — Mason found a stranger fighting by his side.

“Get him up!” said the stranger. “I’m good to hold ’em for awhile.”

And the stranger proved that it was no idle boast. Corbett did his share, but the stranger was the hero of the moment. No one came back to him to be

hit a second time. Some couldn't, and the others didn't want to. He was not a large man, and he was well-dressed, but he had a bulldog face and the fist of a blacksmith.

Darnell was still full of pluck, but evidently badly hurt, for he leaned on Mason for a moment when he regained his feet.

"I'm not out yet," he protested, "but I got a nasty kick in the head."

"To the wagon!" ordered the stranger.

The mob had fallen back a little, and the stranger took advantage of it to make a sudden charge. It was so unexpected and so vicious that he had the way cleared instantly; and Corbett, equally quick and resourceful, followed in his wake with a few well-directed blows that widened the passage, while Mason practically took Darnell in his arms and rushed him to the automobile.

The mob had neglected the machine at first, but now it tried to take possession. Two or three men had clambered up on it, and one was trying to drag the chauffeur from his seat. The stranger caught this one and threw him into the crowd; the other two jumped.

"Let her slide!" cried the stranger. "Full speed ahead!"

People do not stand long in front of a "devil

The Result of the Conference 155

wagon" in motion. Some bricks and stones were thrown, but a few minutes later the automobile was speeding through almost deserted streets in the direction of Darnell's home.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN UNSATISFACTORY WARNING

"WELL," said Corbett, as he entered the office of his city editor, "there was a row, and I was there."

"You look it," asserted McAuley, the managing editor, who happened to be in the room. "If we could run your picture on the first page, we wouldn't need even a hospital report to go with it."

In truth, Corbett was in sorry plight. There were some ugly marks on his face, his clothing was torn, his knuckles were skinned, his hat was missing, and he was generally bruised and lame.

"We've had a bulletin from the City Press Association," McAuley explained, "but there's something about you that leads me to think you are posted as to details."

Then, having had his little joke, McAuley became solicitous and considerate — that is, so far as his news instinct would permit. He took Corbett by the arm and led him into his own room, where he provided a comfortable chair for him.

"You're in no condition to write your story," he said, "but you can dictate it. We've simply got to have it, and have it all. I'll send one of the boys home with you in a carriage as soon as it's done."

"Oh, I'm all right," protested Corbett.

"No one would suspect it," growled McAuley, "and I'll give you a valet to-night on general principles."

He turned to the little crowd that had gathered in the doorway.

"Briggs and Santley, come in here!" he ordered. "The rest of you clear out. Briggs, I want you to take the City Press 'copy' and the outline Corbett will give you and write a lead for the story. Santley, sit down at the table over there and write the details from Corbett's dictation; and when you are through get a carriage and take Corbett home. Hustle, now!" He opened the door to the next room, and called to the night city editor: "Send your boy in here for the start of the story in five minutes, and then keep it going. Whistle up to Langdon and tell him there's three to four columns coming to lead the paper, double-led. It isn't every day that we get a millionaire aldermanic candidate in a riot. Better telephone for a report on Darnell's condition, too," he added, as Corbett suggested that he had not waited to learn how badly he was hurt. With the true newspaper man, the

duty of getting a good story to his paper takes precedence of everything else; all other considerations are of minor importance.

While Corbett, suffering some pain, was dictating his account of the affair, Darnell was being put to bed. Satisfied that no one was dangerously injured, Corbett had left the party and the automobile at a point near his office; but Mason and the stranger had gone on with Darnell. It was still comparatively early, and Mr. and Mrs. Darnell were absent at some social function, so Harold Darnell's two companions had not hesitated to accompany him to his room, although, in view of their appearance after the fight, the servants had been inclined to object. However, Darnell himself had urged them to come in, and, still dizzy and lame, had steadied himself by holding to an arm of each, which made his invitation almost imperative.

The physician, who was hastily summoned, announced that the young man was badly bruised and had a sprained ankle that would keep him quiet for a week or so, but that he had apparently suffered no serious or lasting injury. Then, having made Darnell as comfortable as possible, he gave a little attention to Mason. The latter had suffered only slightly in comparison with Darnell, but he had a scalp wound that had bled rather freely, and would naturally be the better for a proper dressing.

Turning from this to look after the third member of the party, the doctor discovered that he had departed. A servant present said that he had slipped out quietly as soon as the extent and nature of Darnell's injuries had been made known.

"Did you learn his name?" Darnell asked of Mason.

"Never thought of it," replied Mason.

"I'm sorry about that," said Darnell, regretfully.

"He did us a mighty good turn to-night, and we didn't even have a chance to thank him."

"Well, don't worry about that now," urged the doctor. "Just try to get some sleep, and I'll drop in to-morrow morning. I expect you'll find yourself stiffer than a board then."

The doctor spoke wisely, and the morning found his prophecy fulfilled. After he and Mason had left, Darnell put in a restless night, for the boots of the mob had found lodgment in many places, and a frightful headache resulted from one of the kicks received. Furthermore, he seemed to be growing stiffer with every passing hour, and by daylight the pain, when he tried to move, was even greater than it had been when he was put to bed. His mother had given him her personal attention after her return home, and the doctor, when he called, again assured him that, aside from the sprain, he was suffering from nothing except bruises; but this

was small consolation to an active youth, who felt that his opportunities were slipping away. Mason telephoned the encouraging news that the riot promised to be a boomerang for the "machine," but Darnell feared that this was done merely to cheer him up. Then the stranger came. His mother told him that a man with a heavy, rather hard, face was asking for him.

"I sent word to him," she said, "that you could see no one, and he sent word back that he was with you last night. So I went to thank him, but I didn't like his face."

"Send him up!" cried Darnell. "If it hadn't been for him, I'd have come home in an ambulance."

The stranger was somewhat ill at ease, but he tried not to show it.

"Couldn't help comin' over to grip your hand," he said, moving straight to the bed and entirely ignoring Mrs. Darnell. "Wanted to make sure the Doc had you sized up right when he said nothin' was busted."

"I guess something would have been busted, if it hadn't been for you," returned Darnell, grasping the outstretched hand.

"Oh, cut it!" protested the stranger. "It was meat fer me, an' I never could stand by when a feller wasn't gettin' a fair shake. But you're all

right. Fer your inches an' pounds you're real warm when you get started."

"You're not at all chilly yourself," laughed Darnell.

"Oh, me!" said the stranger. "Well, that's my business."

"Your business!"

"Sure. I'm Mike Duffy, middleweight pugilist."

"I've heard of you," said Darnell.

"Sure," returned Duffy, with the air of a man who knew he was famous. "An' you never heard of me doin' a dirty trick or standin' by while a dirty trick was bein' done. That's why I cut in last night, an' that's why I'm cuttin' in now. They got it framed up to do that side-partner of yours over in the Eighth."

"Mason?"

"That's the feller."

"How?" cried Darnell. "Tell me—or," regretfully, as he realised his helplessness, "go and tell Mason."

"Who's the other lad that was with you?" asked Duffy, ignoring this request.

"Corbett. He's a reporter on the *Recorder*."

"He suits me," announced Duffy. "You're out of it, an' Mason ain't got the head on him. He can put up a nasty straight-out fight, but he's shy of

speed in his headpiece. *You're* all right with your quick-action think-tank, but you're out of it now."

"Tell me, anyhow," urged Darnell. "I can think, if I can't act, and there's no time to be lost. It's getting close to election day."

Duffy scratched his head thoughtfully, and then drew up a chair, while Mrs. Darnell stepped into the hall to speak to a servant who had appeared in the doorway.

"It's your game all right enough," said Duffy, "but that reporter is the lad to play the hand just now. You see, I'm wise to a lot that's going on. I don't live in the ward, but I'm next to some that do, an' I hate to see a likely lad done up crooked. I got on to the thing accidental —"

Mrs. Darnell came softly back into the room at this point and approached the bed, whereupon Duffy got up and awkwardly retired a few paces. Mrs. Darnell was far from certain that Duffy's visit was the best thing for her patient, and she was consequently rather glad of a chance to interrupt.

"Here's something a messenger left for you," she said, handing her son an oblong box, carefully wrapped up and tied with a ribbon. "Shall I open it?"

He looked at it curiously for a moment, and then handed it back to her.

"Please do," he said. "I think," with a smile, "it contains a single red rose and the word, 'Encouragement.' It looks like a duplicate of the little package that was left a few days ago."

A deep-red rose and a card were found in the box.

"You see, I was right," said Darnell.

"You were only half right," returned his mother.

"The word on the card is 'Sympathy.'"

"It's from Emily Dale," said Darnell, thoughtfully.

"From Emily Dale!" repeated his mother.

"Yes. I presume she has caught some of her brother's enthusiasm, and wants to show her political faith and loyalty."

"Roses," asserted Mrs. Darnell, with a smile, "are not usually considered political emblems. But," she added, hastily, "it's very thoughtful and kind of her, anyway. She's a dear girl."

"And an independent one," said Darnell, "or she wouldn't be sending roses to me at this time. I must find some way to show my appreciation. Do you know, a single rose somehow seems to appeal to me more than a dozen would? It shows that it is not ordered from a florist."

"And the Dales have no conservatory," suggested Mrs. Darnell.

- The son was puzzled. But the tenor of his thoughts was suddenly changed by the discovery that Duffy had quietly departed, without giving him the promised information.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT DUFFY KNEW

WHEN Duffy slipped away from Darnell he went straight to the office of *The Recorder*, where he hunted up the sporting editor. The latter happened to be known to him personally.

"Where's this lad, Corbett?" he asked.

"What do you want of him?" inquired the sporting editor.

"I've got a hunch that I can put him wise to a few moves," answered Duffy.

"He isn't doing sporting."

"No," returned Duffy, "but I've cut into the political game fer a few minutes."

"Are you the guy that butted into that scrap last night?" asked the sporting editor.

"What if I am?" demanded Duffy.

"McAuley would have given a ten-dollar note to have known it in time for this morning's story," explained the sporting editor. "It was the only detail that got away from us."

"Well, if the lads over there didn't get on to me,

keep it quiet," cautioned Duffy. "I'm not huntin' fer a chance to get a bat over the head when I'm not lookin'. But it was too pretty a scrap to keep out of, an', when one of 'em went down, I had to break in, anyhow. I can't stand fer no such rough work as kicking a man that's down."

It was so unusual for a pugilist to wish to keep his prowess out of the papers that the sporting editor was fairly surprised into a promise to say nothing. Then he informed Duffy that Corbett was at home. Duffy took the address, but, when he emerged from the building, he was in doubt whether it was worth while to go there. After all, it was none of his business. He was ready to do the young fellows a good turn, if circumstances favoured, but circumstances did not.

Not being in training at that particular time, he sauntered into the nearest saloon to think the matter over; but he proved to be too well known there. It is all right to be a celebrity, if one can choose one's own time for receiving the tributes of one's admirers. Two, who knew him, insisted upon introducing several who did not, and all wanted to give him evidence of their appreciation in the customary liquid form. In order to be absolutely impartial he took a drink with every one before leaving.

"Too swift," he commented, when he reached the

street. "That bunch would put me to the bad if I stuck to it."

At the corner he stopped and drew from his pocket a large sheet of dirty paper, carefully folded.

"That's worth something," he said, thoughtfully, "if it gets to the right party, but a feller can't be expected to give all his time to playin' another man's game fer him. I could sell it — But that would be dirty," he added, hastily, "an' the boys are all right. I hate to see a good lad gettin' the worst of it."

Friendship, even where it isn't entirely selfish, is largely a matter of personal convenience in many instances. Duffy had been ready to do a good turn in an offhand way, but he had not planned to make a business of the attempt. As a matter of fact, if the enthusiastic welcome in the saloon had not driven him out, he probably would have abandoned even the indefinite idea he had in mind. Circumstances have a great, and often undetected, influence on human action. Indeed, at this very moment the approach of an unsteady but admiring acquaintance hastened Duffy's decision, and he quickly boarded a car.

Corbett was comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair when Duffy arrived at his boarding-house. He was able to be out, but was too lame to make walking an agreeable exercise. Besides that, a dis-

coloured eye and some plasters on his face made his appearance rather unpresentable.

Duffy, after giving Corbett his name and curtly cutting off the expressions of appreciation for his services the previous night, got down to business promptly.

"If you hold the cards to win," he said, "can you play 'em right?"

"I guess so," returned Corbett, bewildered.

"They've got it fixed to do that lad out in the Eighth," Duffy explained, "but I've got a foolish notion I can give you the winnin' hand — only I want one thing settled sure."

"What's that?"

"I want it played fer politics an' not fer news. If it works fer both, all right, all right; but it's the lads to win first. Will you play it that way?"

"I will," answered Corbett, promptly. "Don't I look as if I'd do anything to beat the gang out there?"

"There's many a good thing spoiled by the newspapers," cautioned Duffy, after admitting that Corbett's personal appearance seemed to indicate that he had no reason to be desperately in love with Mason's opponents, "an' I don't want no chances taken with this. Your paper don't need help, but there's some that does. I'm givin' it to you fer your scrappin' side-partners. Understand?"

"I do," said Corbett.

Apparently satisfied, Duffy drew the big, dirty sheet of paper from his pocket, and for half an hour Corbett listened with intense interest to what he had to say.

When he had departed Corbett sat for a long time, deep in thought.

"Good Lord! what a story!" he exclaimed at last. "But he's right," he added, regretfully. "The publication of it would not elect Mason necessarily, although it might help; and to turn it over to the Safety League would not do it, either. The League might be able to send a few people to the penitentiary, but, so far as Mason is concerned, the damage would be done when they got their evidence. There's only one sure way."

Only a newspaper man, who is forced by circumstances to let a good story get away from him, can appreciate Corbett's mental struggle as he turned the facts over in his mind. He wanted that story for his paper, but he also wanted to make sure of Mason's election, and he was pledged to consider it first and foremost from a political point of view. As Duffy had said, it might be possible to use it professionally as well as politically, but the chances were against it.

"If the Old Man surrenders," he mused, "there will be no story, and Mason will be elected; if he

doesn't, there will be a beautiful story, and Mason *may* be elected. It's the difference between a certainty and a possibility, with only one course open for me."

He waited until the next day before acting on his information, in order that he might be in a little better shape. Then he sent for a cab and went in search of the great local Democratic "boss," Ned Bell.

The Old Man was not in a talkative mood, but he was always reasonably courteous to reporters.

"I don't want to be interviewed," he said, when Corbett found him at the Democratic Club.

"I haven't come to interview you for publication," returned Corbett. "I thought these Eighth Ward bruises that I am carrying might interest you."

"Not a bit," laughed the Old Man. "I've seen that kind before."

"I don't doubt it," said Corbett, "for I know what lies behind these particular ones."

"What?" asked the Old Man, for he noted something unusual in the tone.

"A tricky attempt to defeat Mason," answered Corbett.

"All's fair in love and politics," asserted the Old Man, carelessly.

"That's why I'm here," retorted Corbett promptly. "I have a lovely story."

"Why don't you print it?" asked the Old Man.

"I may," answered Corbett, "but I thought you'd like to hear it first."

The Old Man was both disturbed and puzzled. There was a rough form of banter that he enjoyed and frequently practised with the reporters he knew, but Corbett seemed to be serious. The Old Man decided that it was time for a little dignity.

"You got hurt," he said, "and it was your own fault. I haven't time to listen to hard-luck tales or to threats. I don't care what your story is, either. Print it, if it's a good one."

"Now, don't be hasty," cautioned Corbett, coolly. "You'll lose some good men, if Mason isn't elected; and you'll lose some more, if he is elected and *his election is contested*."

The reference to a contest startled the Old Man.

"And you know best," added Corbett, "whether any of them would talk freely, if they got in a tight place. I think you'd better listen to me."

"Well, what is your story?" growled the Old Man, angrily. It hurt his pride to make this concession, but he was too wise to let pride lead him into danger.

"It is the story of Mason's candidacy and campaign," said Corbett. "It begins with the effort to pledge him before the nomination. Of course, that would be denied, and we would have only Mason's

word for it; but there are corroborative details that would make Mason's word go a long ways with the public. After that comes the little affair of the Safety League pledge; and the story of how Darnell defied you right in this room would make mighty interesting reading."

The Old Man scowled, but he passed the matter off lightly.

"What those boys may say won't do any harm," he asserted, although the mental picture of the ridicule that would be directed at him was not pleasing. "The split with Mason is pretty well known already, and the public naturally expects him to pose as a victim."

"I would follow this," Corbett went on, "with some details of treachery and crooked work that would tend to corroborate the truth of his claim. I would print a facsimile of a certain precinct registration sheet, on which the dummies are marked, or else I would turn that sheet over to the Citizens' Safety League, so that the men who voted the dummy names could be watched, arrested, and prosecuted."

Corbett spoke slowly and distinctly. The Old Man searched the face of his *vis-à-vis* for some evidence of a bluff, but could find none.

"You don't know which precinct that is," added Corbett, significantly.

The Old Man saw the point. Not knowing just where the danger lay, fraudulent voting would be blocked in every precinct in the ward. But he quickly recovered his composure.

"Do you dare insinuate that I have anything to do with such crooked work?" he demanded.

"Not directly," replied Corbett, calmly, "but, when trouble begins, one never knows where it will end. I don't pretend to say that it would ever get to you, but it would get to some people you would miss. On the bottom of that registration sheet a note is scribbled in pencil. It reads, 'Vote names marked as directed,' and is signed with initials. If the names marked are voted, it might make trouble for the man whose initials appear."

The Old Man did not ask what the initials were. Perhaps he knew enough to make a reasonably good guess.

"If that man gets in trouble," persisted Corbett, "he might talk. If he should talk, he might make others talk. And then there is another thing," he went on. "There are certain irregular ballots to be cast for Mason, I understand, in order to lay the foundation for a contest, if all else fails. If those are found in the ballot-box, I can produce a man who heard the plot discussed and some of the instructions given. I don't accuse *you*, understand — I

don't even say that you know of it — but you can stop it, and I expect you to do it. *I expect you to do it to save some useful men and prevent a scandal.*"

"Corbett," said the Old Man, curtly, "you're a pretty good fellow, but you shouldn't bother with what doesn't concern you, and you shouldn't try your hand at bluffing. You're not built for it. You've constructed a nice fairy story out of some idle rumours, but it won't do. I'm not bothering with the Eighth Ward."

"Perhaps I don't make the situation clear," returned Corbett, ignoring this intimation that he was lying. "If Mason is elected and no contest is attempted, there will be no story to print and no prosecutions to make. If these plans are not carried out, it leaves nothing of the story. If the dummy names are not voted and if the irregular ballots are not cast, there will be no evidence on which to prosecute. But if Mason is not elected, I will know the reason why, and if I do not receive your assurance that he will be elected not later than the second day before the election, the story will be printed. If you give me that promise, and are false to it, the Safety League will have the evidence needed to send some people to the penitentiary. That evidence is incomplete now; it can be made complete only by carrying out the scheme contemplated. I expect to

receive your positive assurance that it will not be carried out, and I expect Mason's election to follow as proof of your good faith."

The Old Man knew now that Corbett had a real advantage, but he made one last stand.

"Where is that registration sheet?" he asked.

"Do you think I'm fool enough to carry it about with me?" retorted Corbett. "It's in a safe place."

"Corbett," said the Old Man, "to speak plainly, I think you're lying. You know just about enough of practical politics to invent such a lie as that; but old hands at the business are not easily frightened."

"Bell," returned Corbett, rising, "to speak plainly, I think *you* are lying when you express this doubt. You know better. You know that I could not hit upon the plan for a contest by any random guess, even if I could surmise the rest."

The Old Man scowled, for that was the one point that most troubled him.

"Now, there is nothing to be gained by further discussion," Corbett went on. "I have stated my case. If you want proof of my sincerity all you have to do is to keep still — to do nothing, to say nothing — and the story will appear."

Corbett was at the door.

"You have three days to think it over," he added,

as a parting shot. "On the fourth — well, I think it is good for about a page of *The Recorder*."

At the Democratic Club the attendants noticed that the Old Man was unusually irritable after the reporter had left.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STORY SPOILED

SOCIETY veered again. Possibly sympathy had something to do with it. There are occasions when society can be sympathetic, although its heartlessness is more often in evidence. Perhaps the attack on Darnell convinced it that he was still a member in good standing. At any rate, this seemed to show that he did not belong to that particular element of the population, with which it was feared he would affiliate. Then, too, he had made a fight that had compelled respect in quarters where such prowess is most appreciated. The newspapers had made a hero of him; they treated him as the representative of a class. He had demonstrated that courtesy and good clothes were not necessarily evidence of weakness and lack of manual skill, and the lesson was needed in some districts. Society began to regard him as a champion.

"There are others like him," said the papers, and society liked to think that there were. It did not approve of riots and physical encounters, but, if

such things could not be avoided, it was pleasant to know that one of its number had acquitted himself surprisingly well.

"It has probably taught him a lesson that will keep him out of such scrapes in the future," said society, "but anyway he has proved that blood will tell."

Society likes to talk about blood in this way, and those members of it who have the most plebeian blood in their veins are the ones who derive the greatest pleasure from the advocacy of such a theory. Just to talk in that fashion makes them feel real aristocratic.

So society began to make much of Darnell again, there being numerous inquiries as to the extent of his injuries and his progress toward complete recovery from the effects of them. Young men called in person, and matrons and maids were properly solicitous and sympathetic, when they had opportunity to see Mrs. Darnell. Some of the matrons who were on familiar terms with the Darnells sent him flowers, possibly inspired thereto by their daughters, and with these came another deep-red rose, but this time without any message. Possibly the sender deemed further sympathy or encouragement unnecessary, in view of the amount he was receiving. Possibly, also, there was a fear that the single rose would be lost and forgotten in the mass of other flowers and the subtle

flattery of many inquiries and much attention. At any rate, as Darnell thought of it afterward, it occurred to him that those single roses had come to him only during the period when he was most criticised and ridiculed in social circles. The mysterious gifts ceased when the change of sentiment became fully apparent.

All this he recalled later. At the time he speculated only incidentally as to the identity of the sympathetic one.

"It's quite romantic," he told his mother. "One would hardly expect to find so dainty a romance in municipal politics. But I like it, and I'm going to find out who this unknown is somehow or other — when the campaign is over and I have a little time."

"I thought you knew," said Mrs. Darnell, with a smile.

"I thought I did," returned the son, "until you reminded me that the Dales have no conservatory. But I believe I'm right yet," he added, with conviction, "for I happen to know that Emily Dale was wearing a rose like this the night before the first one was received. Still, you've made me just doubtful enough so that I'll be cautious." After a moment of thought, he said: "As soon as I am able to be out I'll send her a big box of roses with my card. If she's the one, she'll understand that she's dis-

covered and will be sure to say something; if she's not, no harm will be done."

But, for the time being, Darnell was more interested in the Eighth Ward than in anything else — even roses. He wanted to win and he expected to win, but victory in his case was not so important as in Mason's. There were two reasons for this: First, Mason could not afford to lose; second, the fight had been made in the Eighth and not in the Twenty-fourth, and he was personally interested in winning that fight. It was in connection with affairs in that ward that he had defied the Old Man. While he would not have the fruits of victory, it would be personally gratifying to win there.

Mason was discouraged. At Darnell's suggestion, he had tried to get hold of Duffy, but had failed to find him. Then he had called on Corbett.

"What did Duffy know?" he had asked the latter.

"Quite a bit," Corbett had replied. "But I don't think you'd better get mixed up in it. Just leave it to me, and I think you are reasonably safe in considering yourself as good as elected. I'll know to a practical certainty in a day or so."

This was encouraging, but indefinite, and hardly sufficient to counteract other things that tended to destroy his peace of mind. His children had been assailed and his wife was unhappy. The feeling

of the elders is voiced by the youngsters in no uncertain way, and at school the Mason children were made to feel that their father was unpopular in certain circles. They were derided and taunted — not by all, nor even by the majority of their school-mates, but a few aggressive ones can make life a burden to the peace-loving and helpless.

“I tell you, the ramifications of politics are simply endless,” Mason complained bitterly to Darnell one day. “I thought I could go in and make this campaign myself — I thought I could keep it out of my home — but I can’t. Nor can I keep it out of my business. It invades everything. The little woman feels it more than I do, but she’s courageous and tries not to let me know. You see, she thinks she is partly to blame, for she encouraged me to take the nomination, and she knows what it means to lose now.”

“Have you had any more rough experiences?” asked Darnell.

“No. Everything has been as quiet as could be expected. Some jeering, of course, but no rows.”

“That’s a good sign,” suggested Darnell.

“On the contrary,” returned Mason, “I think it’s a bad sign. To tell the truth, there hasn’t been much of any campaign since you dropped out. You were the drawing-card. They wanted to see and hear you, and I’ve discovered that I am hardly worth bothering

about. The Safety League has given me a few opportunities to speak, but the results have been discouraging. I've practically given up doing any talking. In fact, although I know I can poll a pretty good vote, there's no sort of doubt in my mind that the 'machine' has the balance of power between me and O'Hara, and it doesn't want me."

Darnell gave a few minutes to thought before replying, and then asked if Corbett was on duty again.

"I believe so," said Mason, "but I haven't seen him for a day or so."

"See if you can get him on the telephone," instructed Darnell, "and ask him to come up here."

Corbett was reached at the office of *The Recorder*, and responded promptly to the summons. His face still bore some evidences of the trouble in the Eighth Ward, and he walked with a cane. He had reported to his managing editor the morning after his interview with the Old Man, and this was only his second day on duty.

"I'm slightly disabled," he laughed, "but still good enough for a little desk work, and McAuley is making it easy for me."

"I'm glad you're out," said Darnell, "but just now I'm more worried about Mason than about either you or myself. His reports of affairs in the Eighth Ward are mighty discouraging; and, Cor-

bett," impressively, "I want to see the gang beaten in the Eighth Ward. I'm more interested in that than I am in my own election. Now, our pugilistic friend, Duffy, came here with a story that he said would help us in the Eighth. I don't know what it was, for he left before telling me, but he told it to you."

"Yes," admitted Corbett.

"What was it?" demanded Darnell.

A peculiar, quizzical smile illumined Corbett's face, but for a moment he made no reply.

"I think we have a right to know," insisted Darnell. "The story, or information, or whatever it was, was intended for use in connection with this campaign."

"Well," said Corbett, "it was one of the finest newspaper stories that ever came to my notice, but it has been spoiled."

"How spoiled? Did you bungle it?" asked Darnell.

"I don't think so," answered Corbett. "You see, the election of Mason in the Eighth is the only thing that can possibly spoil it."

Both Darnell and Mason showed their interest and surprise.

"Mason is not elected," suggested Darnell.

"No," answered Corbett, "but about an hour ago I received this little note."

The note that he handed to Darnell was terse almost to the point of discourtesy. It read simply:

“CORBETT: — I’m going to spoil your big story.

“BELL.”

“I think it’s safe to say,” added Corbett, “that the writing of that note was one of the hardest and most distasteful things that Ned Bell ever had to do, but that’s all that I will say.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DAY OF THE ELECTION

CORBETT was not a man to be lured to rest by a false sense of security, so he called upon Elbert Norris of the Safety League the day before the election. Under the circumstances, he believed that the Old Man would do as he agreed, but he wished to be sure. Besides, he had less confidence in some of the Old Man's lieutenants than he had in the Old Man himself. Howe and Pepper were bitterly opposed to Mason because of his refusal to pledge himself to their interests, and Lewis was merely a reflection of Howe. They had no love for O'Hara, but they deemed it good politics, in addition to being personally gratifying, to punish Mason. To hold them in line the Old Man would have to make an aggressive stand.

Norris was not exactly satisfied with what Corbett told him, which was quite natural. Corbett was withholding much, and the Safety League man knew it.

"Give me the whole story," he said, "and I'll act."

Corbett protested that as yet there was no story, and that the only way to get a story was to arrest any who might attempt to vote the names he furnished.

"They are dummies," he said, "and an investigation will prove it, but the only way you can get at the people is to say nothing and arrest any man or men who try to vote the names."

Norris was doubtful, but Corbett insisted that he would be absolutely safe in making such arrests.

"You will find," he asserted, positively, "that the man arrested is not known by the name on the registration list and does not live — except possibly temporarily — at the address given. To get at the people behind the fraudulent voter you must first catch the voter. When you catch him, I may be able to help you."

The result of this conference came to the ears of the Old Man late that evening in a roundabout way. The night before election there is little happens that is not brought to the attention of a political "boss," and even the wisest are unable to say what sources of information may be open to him.

Norris decided to act on Corbett's tip, after consulting with one or two other members of the Safety League. To do this effectively, it was necessary to

have warrants ready, and it so happened that the justice for whom he sought could not be found. The justice who was found, and who issued the warrants, afterward whispered something confidentially to his clerk. Thereupon the clerk went to a certain politician, and the politician went to the Old Man. It was just as well, the justice thought, that the information should not come directly from either him or his clerk.

Now, the Old Man had given proper warning to his satellites in the Eighth Ward, but he had not made it as emphatic as he might. He doubted whether Corbett could do anything by himself, and after the election it would be rather late to put the matter in the hands of the Safety League. Unless the men who voted those names were caught in the act, there would be slight chance of their arrest; it would be difficult to find or identify them afterward. The publication of the story would create a scandal that might or might not be dangerous to some one, but there was no chance that it would reach the Old Man himself, for he kept clear of such minor schemes. He might know of them, he might tacitly consent to them, he might even indirectly suggest and encourage them; but he could not be directly implicated. If he could lure Corbett to inactivity at the critical time, the plan might be put through with reasonable safety. Still, there was a risk; that

marked registration sheet might be sufficient foundation on which to build a good case against somebody; and the wise political "boss" protects his subordinates. So the Old Man had given them warning of the danger, without going into details. If any wished to take the chance, that was their business.

But the word that came to him now changed the whole complexion of the affair. It was more than a risk now; it was a certainty of trouble.

"That fellow," growled the Old Man, referring to Corbett, "would make a rattling good politician. There's only one way to get results, and he knows the way."

Then the Old Man began to use the telephone. It was pretty late, but politicians are reasonably busy the night before an election, and after a time he succeeded in getting hold of Senator Pepper. He wanted Bob Howe, but Howe could not be located. Pepper came to him in a hurry, as a result of the message he received.

"Pepper," said the Old Man, "I tipped it off to Howe that there was likely to be trouble in the Eighth if he tried any tricks there, and of course he told you. Now, I don't know how you took that tip, and I didn't much care until to-night. If you fellows were so set on beating Mason that you wanted to run risks, it was your funeral. But I

want you to understand now that it's past the risk stage, and Mason has got to be elected."

"What is it to you?" asked Pepper, sullenly.

"Well, not so much to me as to some others," answered the Old Man. "There are some people in that ward I should hate to lose, but it's going to hurt them a lot more than it does me. Perhaps you're one of them. At any rate, I'll give you a tip for your own good. Norris, of the Safety League, has sworn out a batch of warrants, and the names on those warrants are said to correspond with certain dummy names on the registration books. It's a dead certainty that any one trying to vote any of those names will be arrested. If there's anything of that sort in the wind, don't you think you'd better head it off?"

The Old Man smiled in a self-satisfied way as he said this. He had given warning before, and this development demonstrated his superior wisdom. Then, too, the startled expression on Pepper's face was somewhat amusing.

"I don't know how much Norris has been told," continued the Old Man, "but I have reason to believe his informant knows a good deal, and is in a position to make trouble in other ways. Things are not in very good shape in the Eighth, you know. There have been some narrow escapes from an explosion before this. But any charges that can be

made will fall flat, if Mason is elected by a good majority. I think you'd better put him through. You and Howe and Lewis can swing enough votes to do it without trouble."

"Rather a sudden change for you, isn't it?" asked Pepper.

"Oh, no," answered the Old Man, carelessly. "I don't think much of him personally, and I was ready to let the boys 'do' him after that row about the Safety League pledge, but it hasn't been my fight at any time. As a matter of fact, there's mighty little choice between him and O'Hara. And, anyhow, this is a question of self-preservation for some of you." Then, resuming his customary autocratic air: "Pepper, you may not like it, and I may not like it, but the fellow who doesn't know when a man has got the strangle hold on him is a damn fool. Just now there's only one sure way of avoiding trouble, and trouble in the Eighth means hell. Things are rotten there, and you know it."

The amount of hustling that Pepper did during the rest of that night was simply extraordinary. He even routed people out of bed, and long before the polls were opened Howe and Lewis were giving him active assistance. It is not easy to stop the execution of a well-laid plot at the very last moment, but there were people in the Eighth Ward who appreciated how much depended on a thorough rearrange-

ment of plans. The consequences of a slip might be serious.

The work was effective, and the news travelled. Many of the rank and file of the ward "machine" were glad of the opportunity to vote for Mason, and many others felt that it was the only safe thing to do. They did not wish to be investigated, or to be even indirectly connected with an investigation, for they were far from being above suspicion. So they not only voted for Mason, but they let it be known far and wide that they had voted for him. That, they held, would keep them clear of trouble, for the reported evidence of trickery related only to those who opposed Mason.

As O'Hara and Mason divided the vote of the better class pretty evenly between them, this sudden change in the quarters where the "machine" was strong gave the younger man a clear lead from the start — a lead that was steadily increased during the day. In fact, the suddenness of the movement in his direction probably gave him a heavier vote than he would have polled had he had the "machine" indorsement throughout the campaign. The anxiety of many to advertise their change created a sentiment that was closely allied to enthusiasm, and the irresolute promptly fell in line.

The Eighth Ward was the sensation of the day, almost eclipsing in interest the returns on the city

ticket. Indeed, in Casey's saloon there was less talk of the mayoralty candidates than there was of Mason.

"Now, what do ye think iv that?" demanded Jim Casey, when he heard that Mason was steadily increasing his lead.

The remark was addressed to Ben Hogan, a hold-over alderman, who happened to be in the place. Hogan was a little man, but his raiment was so bright that he was sometimes taken for a searchlight coming down the street. While he was not the originator of this sartorial method of keeping himself in the eyes of the public, he was a good second to "Rainbow John" Coakley, who also had a seat in the Council.

"I didn't think," Casey went on, "that th' lad had it in him, but ye niver can tell. If ye luk into th' matther, Hogan, ye may find that he's been playin' some iv ye-er thricks over in his war-rd."

"What are my tricks?" asked Hogan, idly. He liked to be given credit for cleverness, even if the cleverness was of a nature to which some men might take exceptions.

"Well, iv coorse I don't know annything about it mesilf," explained Casey, apologetically, "an' I'm only tellin' ye what I've hear-rd. But they do say that wan night ye was held up — iv coorse, be a man that didn't know ye — an' he got a twinty-dollar bill,

l'avin' ye-er watch an' chain because he had no dray f'r to cart thim away."

Hogan laughed. Gibes and jests did not trouble him in the least.

"Well, accordin' to this shtory," Casey went on, "ye niver overluk annything in politics, which is why ye have ye-er ward so solid, an', there bein' an eliction comin' on, ye says to th' man sort iv sad-like, 'Me fri'nd,' ye says, 'ye're wilcome to th' twinty,' ye says, 'but there's no use shtealin' it. If ye're a shquare man,' ye says, 'ye'll deliver me tin votes f'r it, th' markit price bein' two dollars a vote.' An' they say," Casey added, "that th' felly shook hands with ye, an' ye got th' votes."

"It's a lie," asserted Hogan.

"Is it, now?" asked Casey, innocently.

"Of course it is," said Hogan, with an unusual display of warmth, "and such stories do lots of harm."

"Mebbe so," admitted Casey.

"They raise expectations so high," said Hogan, "that it's mighty hard afterward to round the gang up at fifty cents a head. I tell you, Casey, a joke's a joke, but they've got no right to make a spendthrift fool of a man."

"Well, annyhow," said Casey, "this lad Mason has some thricks that are new, or he'd niver be r-runnin' away an' takin' th' hurdles like he is. I

tell ye, Hogan, some people sized that felly up wr-rong at th' beginnin'. They had th' idee that they c'u'd play hor-rse with him, but I'm thinkin' that he's th' wan that's in th' saddle now."

"He isn't doing it himself," protested Hogan. "It's the Old Man who's electing him."

"Sure," said Casey. "An' f'r why? Because he likes him, d'ye think? Is th' Ol' Man throubled be an ingrowin' conscience all iv a sudden? Ye know betther. Some wan's been givin' him palpitation iv th' hear-rt. F'r a fac', Hogan, this lad may not be doin' th' wor-rk in th' Eighth Ward, but it luks to me like he's doin' th' Ol' Man."

There were others besides Jim Casey who took this view of it, and quite naturally. After once abandoning Mason, the "machine" seemed to be exerting itself to the utmost to elect him. This created general astonishment, and there seemed to be only two possible explanations: Either Mason had surrendered to the "machine" or by some clever move he had put himself in a position to dictate terms to it. Some took one view and some another.

Elbert Norris of the Safety League was among the doubtful ones. Not one of the dummy names was voted, which seemed suspicious. And some of those he had hoped and expected to catch in crooked work were shouting and voting for Mason,

which was more suspicious. It looked to him very much as if something were wrong, and he decided to reproach Corbett at the first opportunity for giving him unnecessary work by putting him on a false scent. Still he had to admit that something had been gained, for he had certain names that never again would be found on the registration books, and there was still a chance that investigation of these names and addresses might lead to developments that would further clear the political atmosphere in the Eighth Ward.

Corbett himself was jubilant. When the polls closed it was evident that Darnell had been elected in the Twenty-fourth, while Mason's majority in the Eighth was almost unprecedented. It was so great as to leave no possible excuse or chance for a contest, even had that plan not been abandoned at the first intimation of danger. That was the one feature of the scheme that had been discarded promptly and entirely, for the fact that even a hint of it had leaked out made the risk an absolutely foolhardy one. But the result was more completely satisfactory than Corbett had even dared hope, and there was a ring of exultation in his voice when he called Darnell up on the telephone.

"You're all right, with just a comfortable plurality," he told the latter, "but have you heard from the Eighth?"

"I should say I had," replied Darnell. "It's simply paralysing. I hoped he would squeeze through, but I never expected anything like this. What's the secret of it?"

"Well," replied Corbett, with a happy but tantalising laugh, "that's what Duffy knew. I believe I told you that the matter was practically settled."

What Duffy knew was what every political prophet and wise man wanted to know that night. Lacking that information, they could only speculate and wonder, knowing just enough to know that they did not know what they wanted to know.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ALDERMANIC INNOVATION

THE social method of celebrating an event is to feed one's friends. If great honour comes to a man in public life, there is a banquet; if Mrs. Grundy has a distinguished guest, there is a dinner, if Miss Grundy's engagement is announced, there is a luncheon. The first thought that occurs to the average American when it is desired to do honour to any occasion or any person seems to relate to good things to eat and drink. If the President of the United States did not stick pretty close to the White House, he would certainly have dyspepsia, for whenever he stirs abroad he is called upon to eat; and the distinguished foreigner who visits this hospitable country must almost hate the sight of food by the time he gets away. The height of the social season, when *débutantes*, visitors, engagements, and anniversaries hold the attention, is a period of discouragement for all whose capacity and digestion are not exceptionally good. One must eat to show appreciation of an honour or to confer an honour or as a delicate method of extending congratulations.

So it naturally happened that Mr. and Mrs. Darnell gave a dinner. Just why, it would be difficult to say. It seemed to be generally understood that it was indirectly connected with their son's success, but it was not ostensibly in celebration of that event. Perhaps it could be explained on the theory that something seemed to be expected of them, and they could think of nothing else. Perhaps, after the strenuousness of the campaign, they deemed a little social relaxation a good thing for the young man. Perhaps Mrs. Darnell was anxious that he should not be identified with politics to the exclusion of society.

At any rate, Mr. and Mrs. Darnell gave a dinner, and by far the happiest and proudest woman in the room was Mrs. Joseph Mason, wife of the alderman-elect of the Eighth Ward. It was a new experience for her, and a delightful one. She was not ignorant and she was not entirely unversed in social usages, for she was of good family, and as a girl had had many modest advantages, but in perfection of appointments and brilliancy of the assemblage this dinner far excelled anything known to her experience. She was happy, just to be there with her husband. Somehow she felt that it was a deserved recognition of his merit. How could she know that Darnell had had quite a warm argument with his mother before the invitation was extended? How

could she know that Mrs. Darnell, although kindly disposed, had been fearful that the Masons would seem out of place? And, if truth be known, Mason himself did not feel at all comfortable. He could not readily adapt himself (as almost every woman can) to unaccustomed surroundings. He knew, however, that the invitation had been given largely to please his wife. Darnell had met her several times during the campaign, and he had learned enough of her view of things to appreciate how this invitation would delight her; and, as his friendship for Mason was sincere, he was naturally anxious to please the latter's wife. So he had answered for her when his mother objected, had won the day, and now he had no occasion to regret it. Mrs. Mason did not shine in general conversation, but she was unobtrusively happy and made no serious social blunders. Her gown was not of the latest fashion, but it was becoming, and not so out of date as to be noticeable. And her supreme confidence and pride in her husband were refreshing. Emily Dale and Josephine Hadley seemed to find her especially agreeable and entertaining, for she was engagingly candid and fresh as soon as she gained enough confidence to talk freely with them.

Perhaps the fact that Mrs. Mason was brimming over with enthusiasm for Darnell had nothing to

do with it, but Miss Hadley seemed to listen to her with particular interest.

"We only got the newspaper reports of all the trouble in the Eighth Ward," suggested Miss Hadley, "but you must have seen some of it."

"No," answered Mrs. Mason, "I didn't see any of it, but I felt it. Why, it actually seemed to be in the air. Every night that Joe went out I was afraid he would get hurt, and he did finally, but not so bad as Mr. Darnell. They kicked him when he was down, Joe told me — the cowards!"

"The cowards!" echoed Miss Hadley, with scornful emphasis, and then she added hastily, as if regretting that she had been betrayed into this unconventional display of feeling: "But perhaps the sprained ankle that kept him in the house the last week of the campaign saved him from more serious trouble."

"I'm sure it did," answered Mrs. Mason, glancing sympathetically at Darnell, who could not conceal the fact that his ankle still gave him some trouble. "And it was all on account of Joe, too. I tell you, there isn't anything we wouldn't do for Mr. Darnell, for we both think he won the ward for us. But it's all over now, thank heaven! and Joe has his chance to show what a good alderman can do, even in that ward."

Miss Hadley smiled at the references to "Joe,"

but there was something underlying it all that appealed to her.

"I suppose he has planned it all out," she suggested. "Will he have an office in the ward?"

"An office in the ward!" repeated Mrs. Mason. "Why, his store is in the ward, and that ought to be a good enough office."

"Of course," admitted Miss Hadley. "I didn't think of that. You see, the other day papa wanted to see one of the aldermen of our ward, and he couldn't find him. He had no office here and no office hours anywhere, and papa growled about it a good deal. If I were an alderman, it seems to me I'd make a business of it, and I'd have just as much system for it as I would for any other business."

Mrs. Mason looked at Miss Hadley in astonishment. That a young woman in society should ever think of so insignificant a detail as that seemed to her extraordinary. Why, even she, the wife of an alderman-elect, had given no thought, except in the most general way, to aldermanic duties, while this girl had evolved some ideas of her own.

Before she could reply, there was an interruption in the person of Stanley Fisher. Fisher was not comfortable. Darnell would have preferred not to invite him, but Mrs. Darnell had insisted that this would be a mistake and might be construed as an affront to the Hadleys, if, as reported, he was to

marry Miss Hadley. Fisher himself had been averse to coming, and had tried to dissuade Miss Hadley. Failing in that, he had deemed it the part of wisdom to accept in order to protect his own interests. He wished to be with or near Miss Hadley so far as possible whenever she appeared in society, and he wished most of all to keep her away from Darnell. No one knew better than he that a very little thing might sadly disarrange certain plans that he had made with great care.

Fisher was glad that the fact that he was to take Miss Hadley in to dinner gave him an excuse for interrupting the conversation. The Masons were too close to Darnell. As the result of confidences exchanged, the way might be paved for explanations. Of course, this was unlikely, but one can never tell what will happen, and the very apparent misunderstanding between Darnell and Miss Hadley — apparent to Fisher, especially — exemplified a condition of affairs that he wished to have continued. Then, too, Fisher had that jealous regard for social position that is so often found in the man or woman who is not born to it. He was disposed to prove his right to be classed with those whose positions were secure by being sarcastically humourous or critical in his references to all others.

“I gathered that she was telling you about ‘Joe,’” he laughed, as he took her away.

"Why not?" asked Miss Hadley, quickly. "Half of her refreshing enthusiasm and confidence would seem to be lacking if she didn't refer to him as 'Joe.' She'd have no more individuality than the rest of us."

"Haven't we individuality?"

"Well, yes, I suppose we have; but, so far as society is concerned, we try to conceal the fact."

"I venture to say," he persisted, "that she'll make some frightful blunder before the evening is over."

"I venture to say," retorted Miss Hadley, "that the only blunder she'll make will be to show that she believes implicitly in her husband. Of course, that is distinctly bad form, but I rather like it, for a change. And I like her. She's interesting."

Fisher made a quick, but clever, shift. He did not exactly retract anything, but he admitted that such unconventionality was refreshing, and that unquestionably Mrs. Mason was a most estimable woman. Fisher was always cautious when Miss Hadley displayed earnestness in expressing her views.

The dinner was a large one, even for the Darnells, with whom this was a favourite method of entertaining. In addition to the young people, Mr. and Mrs. Hadley, Mr. and Mrs. Dale, and various other close friends of Mr. and Mrs. Darnell were

present. In consequence there was very little general conversation, although an occasional sally was made for the benefit of all. Among these was a demand made upon Darnell for a political speech.

"We just want to see how you do it," urged Albert Dale, who had maliciously conspired with Fred Enderly to bring about this divertisement.

"We don't want a dinner talk, but straight politics," put in Enderly.

"Oh, *do* make a stump speech!" cried some of the girls.

The older people readily fell into the spirit of the affair, and cried, "Speech! Speech!"

Darnell rose and bowed with mock solemnity.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "this is a great and unexpected honour, and finds me wholly unprepared." He took a card from his pocket and made a pretence of referring to notes on the back of it. "I can only say that I believe the office should seek the man and not the man the office. You well know that I did not work for this more than twenty-four hours a day. I did not chase the office, except in a racing automobile. I waited for it to come to me, after I'd tied a rope to it. When other candidates were exerting themselves to the utmost, I remained patiently in the house with a sprained ankle. I defy you to show me any man in a similar position, who was as quiet as I was during the last week of the

campaign. Now that I am an alderman, I desire only to make the modest promise that I will reform everything from the dog-tax to the tariff; I will change the history of this great country; my influence will be felt from the parks to the White House. I — ”

“ Oh, be specific! ” broke in Dale. “ What are you going to do for us? I want a street vacated. ”

“ And I want a permit for an overhanging sign! ” cried Enderly.

Darnell laughed and sat down.

“ Miss Hadley could give you some good ideas, ” urged Dale, who remembered her remarks at a previous dinner; “ couldn’t you, Miss Hadley? ”

Miss Hadley smiled and shook her head.

“ She did once, ” asserted Miss Shelby.

“ It was the only idea I ever had, ” laughed Miss Hadley.

“ Oh, that isn’t so, ” said Mrs. Mason, confidentially, to Darnell, who sat beside her. “ She told me of another before we came in to dinner. ”

“ What was it? ” asked Darnell.

“ She thinks an alderman should have an office for the transaction of public business, just like the mayor, and that he should be just as systematic in attending to it. ”

“ She certainly has some original ideas, ” returned

Darnell, with a laugh. "I planned a few business-like innovations myself, but I didn't go quite so far as that."

Later in the evening he was with Miss Hadley for a few minutes, and neither was quite at ease. While friendly, they had ceased to be frank, and each felt that something was due from the other. Each longed for the word that would restore the old relations, but neither was sure enough of the other to say it. He thought of her implied criticism on a previous occasion and of her reported engagement to another, while she could not forget how completely he had forsaken her since she had expressed her views on manly independence.

"I trust you will not deem me weak," he said, "if I act on another suggestion of yours."

"I shall be flattered," she returned, "but I didn't know I had made one."

"It is the ward office plan," he explained. "Mrs. Mason told me about it, and I like it. Of course, it would be more creditable if I had thought of it myself, but I assure you I have some other ideas that are my own. For this, however, I must acknowledge my indebtedness to you, if I am to be honest about it — even at the risk of seeming to lack any personal resourcefulness."

Stanley Fisher was at her side before she could

reply, but she smiled as Darnell bowed and left. He had told her more than he thought, but less than she wished. Forgetfulness proves indifference, and he had not forgotten.

CHAPTER XXI.

A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

MISS HADLEY prepared the fourth rose for her knight with entirely new emotions. She had sent the first because the attitude of others toward him at the time made her indignant: he was being assailed and ridiculed when she thought he deserved encouragement. She had sent the second and third because she thought he was fairly entitled to sympathy: he had been the victim of a cowardly attack, and it was a gratification to be able to express her feelings, even though anonymously. She had not analysed the sentiment that prompted her, but she had sent the roses, and had found pleasure in the act. The fourth rose would not have been sent at all, had there not been a general determination to see that he was not neglected at the first meeting of the Council. It was the custom, the young people understood, to load down new and reelected members with floral offerings, and Albert Dale had suggested that they really ought to see that Darnell did not suffer from comparison with others. Thereupon

with considerable merriment, plans had been made to practically bury his desk under a mass of flowers.

"We'll make even 'Rainbow John' envious," urged Dale.

Outwardly, Miss Hadley was no more enthusiastic than any of the others, but the plan pleased her greatly. She was delighted with the excuse it gave her to do what she wanted to do, and she laughed happily as she arranged the single rose in its little box. There had been encouragement and sympathy before; now there was triumph. He had not forgotten; he was still brooding; he was sensitive to her lightest word. What girl needs to know more than that? And, knowing it, what girl would not mete out a little punishment to a young man for his foolishness? It pleased her to think that she had only to put her card in with the rose to bring him back to her at once, but she had no thought of doing it. For the moment the sense of power was sufficiently satisfying.

Miss Hadley, Miss Dale, Fred Enderly, Albert Dale, and Mrs. Darnell were present at the Council meeting as guests of the mayor. The mayor had social aspirations, and was extremely anxious to be clever to Mrs. Darnell. Just how Stanley Fisher happened to be left out no one could say, but he was not included in the invitation, and was not present. Nor did his absence seem to trouble Miss

Hadley, so far as the others could judge. She was watching Darnell, but, for that matter, so was Miss Dale; and when he found that single rose, he looked and smiled. The smile might be for either or for both, but Miss Hadley associated it with the rose, and wondered if he suspected the truth. Miss Dale, who was carrying a magnificent bunch of roses herself, returned the smile. Then other matters claimed the attention of all.

The Council-chamber looked like a flower show. There was at least one big bouquet on almost every desk, and some were loaded down with cut flowers and set pieces.

"And," said Corbett, who had been sent to them by Darnell to point out the celebrities, "the more notorious the alderman the bigger his floral display as a general rule."

"But how can the people of some of the poor wards afford to do so much?" asked Miss Dale.

"Well, perhaps I can explain that best by a little story," answered Corbett. "When the last Council was organised, a magnificent floral piece was delivered to Baxter, the man that Mason defeated this year. The messenger insisted upon delivering it personally to Baxter, and, when he did so, he blurted out, 'The boss told me to collect for this now. The last time it took him six months to get the money from you.' And Baxter had to

dig down into his pocket and pay for the flowers right then and there."

"Do you mean to say that they send themselves flowers?" inquired Miss Hadley.

"Sometimes," replied Corbett. "Why, there are aldermen," he added, "who are up to all the tricks of an envious operatic prima donna, even to the point of having a well-organised clique in the gallery. It gives the impression of popularity they like, and the first meeting after an election is a sort of free-for-all."

Then Corbett began to point out the ones who had the most interesting personality. There was Cassidy, the man who once "held up" Croker of New York, for instance.

"He had his pocket picked when he was down there as a guest of Tammany Hall, with a lot of other politicians," explained Corbett, "and he blamed Croker for it.

"'You ought to make it good,' he told Croker, 'for some of your fellows did it, and if I'm to lose it, I'll stay here till I find him, and then you'll be shy a good worker at the next election.'

"'If I needed him,' laughed Croker, 'I guess you couldn't convict him.'

"'Convict him!' cried Cassidy. 'Who wants to convict him? If I get after him, I'll send him to

the hospital for a year. And I'll advertise the way you entertain your friends here, too.'

"Croker was a power in those days, but he didn't like to have any such story as that get out, so he made the loss good.

" 'But I'll tell you one thing,' he said, as he was counting out the money. 'If you'd had your signal out, he never would have touched you. There's a friendly feeling between the pickpockets and the hold-up men here.'

"And Cassidy," Corbett concluded, "has lived on the reputation of having got the best of Croker ever since."

Then he pointed out "Rainbow John" Coakley and Ben Hogan, who were casting envious glances at each other's clothes.

"They might properly be termed the Arc Light and the Incandescent Light," he explained. "So far as sartorial brilliancy is concerned, there isn't much difference, but one is larger than the other. Coakley really ought to have a patent on that method of aldermanic advertising, though, for he started it, and Hogan fell in line only after Coakley had dazzled the Atlantic coast. But Hogan is a good second. The last time he went away from home, the papers had daily bulletins, giving the colours and cut of the garments he was wearing. Both are dressed with exceptional modesty to-night. You

ought to see 'Rainbow John' in his purple dress suit, with white satin lining and facing."

"They must be rich to spend so much on clothes," remarked Miss Dale.

"Well," returned Corbett, "the last time one of them appeared in a new suit some facetious fellow suggested that he was attired in the latest franchise. You can't always tell who pays for things in the Council. And that reminds me of a good telephone story that they tell on Hogan. It was just after the nickel-in-the-slot telephones were put in, but he happened into a place where they had one of the old ten-cent instruments.

"'Ten cents!' he cried. 'It's robbery. Why, at the city hall you can telephone to Hades for a nickel.'"

"'Oh, well,' was the reply, 'you don't have to use the telephone at all to reach Hades from the city hall.'"

"What's the significance of that floral ship?" asked Enderly, indicating the direction by a nod of his head.

"It has none," answered Corbett. "The people who send flowers to the aldermen only ask that a design shall be big and showy."

"What ward does he represent?" inquired Dale.

"He doesn't represent a ward," replied Corbett,

promptly; "he represents a traction company. He had a very sad experience two years ago."

"What was that?" asked Dale.

"Somebody sent him a floral lyre. He didn't know what it was, and neither did most of his friends, but finally one wise alderman blurted out, 'It's a lyre.' It took quick action to prevent a fight right then and there, but the rest of the aldermen enjoyed the joke. They told him there was evidently some one who knew him. He didn't hear the last of it for six months or a year."

The Council proceedings were well under way now, and, while interesting, practically nothing was done. It is seldom that anything is accomplished at the first meeting after an election. The old men are taking the measure of the new men, and the new men are endeavouring to accustom themselves to their surroundings and the methods of procedure. With few exceptions, the men who take the floor do so for the benefit of their admiring constituents in the gallery. They pose and they talk; they endeavour to be dramatic or facetious; but they seldom say anything. They are part of a spectacle, ambitious only to show that they are of sufficient importance to have speaking parts. A little prominence at such a time helps some of them in their wards, and, besides, there is an occasional desire to give their constituents a chance to applaud. Of

course, this is not true of all, but it is of those who are most in evidence on a new Council's first night.

It is a good show, too, for those capable of appreciating it. A man may play the clown to the educated, and still be regarded as a great orator and a great man by his friends in the gallery; and it is their opinion alone for which he most cares. He may play the clown intentionally or he may play it unwittingly; in some cases it is good politics from an aldermanic point of view. Then, occasionally, the alderman is like the boy on exhibition-day at school: he wants to show off. But, when all is said and done, the announcement of the committee lists represents about the only real business accomplished.

That was the case on this particular night. As a spectacular comedy it was highly diverting, but that was all there was to it — flowers, horse-play, applause, and many serio-comic efforts in the speech-making line. The mayor's party enjoyed it greatly; and at the conclusion there was a little unappreciated comedy that was out of the usual line. Miss Hadley and Miss Dale both turned to greet Darnell as he approached. Miss Hadley was looking self-conscious, for she was under the impression that he had guessed from whom that single rose came, and she was in a humour to make the necessary ad-

mission, if he accused her of it. But Miss Dale was the nearer to him, and she was the first to speak.

"Thank you so much for these beautiful roses!" she exclaimed.

He gave her a quick, searching glance, as he made an appropriate reply, but her face expressed nothing except the pleasure any girl would feel in such circumstances; there was not even a hint or suggestion of anything else.

"That settles it," he said to himself. "If the single red roses were from her, she would have surmised that I suspected it when she received these, and her face would surely betray her now, if her words didn't. Who can have sent them?"

He turned to Miss Hadley, but her greeting was very formal.

If men and women applied the same hard sense to their own love-affairs that they apply to those of others, there would be few misunderstandings. But they do not.

Miss Hadley had flowers with which Stanley Fisher had very properly provided her, and there was no good reason why Darnell should not send some to Miss Dale. Miss Hadley had no need of additional flowers, and one always hesitates to send them to a girl who is receiving devoted attention from another man. If Darnell had duplicated his roses for her benefit, she would not have known what

to do with them. She did not expect him to send her any flowers, she did not wish him to do so; but —

Miss Hadley's greeting to Darnell was very formal, not to say cold.

CHAPTER XXII.

WOES OF AN ALDERMAN

WHILE not treated with such distinguished consideration as the members of the Darnell party, Mrs. Joseph Mason was quite as interested a spectator of the Council proceedings. She had not been honoured by an invitation from the mayor to be his personal guest, so she was in the gallery, and she found it rather crowded. But she would have endured much more of discomfort for the privilege of seeing "Joe" in his official seat as one of the law-makers of the city. Her face glowed with pleasure, and she dreamed strange dreams. This was only the beginning; later he would achieve distinction and really high honours. This was only an opportunity, but opportunity was all that such a man as "Joe" needed to gain success. And it was a \$3,000 opportunity — two years at \$1,500 a year.

She was full of enthusiasm as they went home that night, and she was full of enthusiasm the next day. The ward could not fail to discover that it

never before had had such an able, earnest, and conscientious a representative, and what the ward discovered could not remain long unknown to others. He would accomplish great things — just what, she could not say; but, in a general way, she knew there was much to be done, and he was the man to do it. She told him so.

Then she received her first shock. That aldermanic salary was not to be clear profit, as she had supposed. Campaign expenses had been high, receipts at the store had been comparatively light, and he was in debt. In order to make the expected contribution to the campaign fund, he had given a note to raise the money. When it had become necessary for Darnell and himself to make an independent campaign, he had given another note to raise more money. If he had been less independent, it would have cost him less, for honesty and the courage of one's convictions are sometimes expensive. From a business point of view, the independent part of the campaign was an ill-advised venture, for it was more costly than the other, and defeat would have left him in a serious predicament. But he was angry then, and, when Darnell chose to stick with him, he felt that he could do no less than make the fight. As it was, Darnell had stood more than his share of the expenses: Mason's share, however, was sufficient to make him thoughtful when

he took the time to figure out where he stood. Some of his stock had been purchased on time, also, which meant additional expenses to be met. All in all, it would be some time before there would be any margin to either save or spend according to the prearranged plan.

Somehow Mrs. Mason had never given any thought to the expenses of a campaign. Of course, she knew they had to be met, but she had an indefinite idea that campaign committees always had money for such purposes. Where that money came from was a point to which she had given no consideration. So she was greatly disappointed, but still as considerate as ever. She would make the best of the situation. It was too bad that he had to do it, but she knew he couldn't help it. Most of the fault lay with the mean, contemptible men who had tried to bend him to their selfish and corrupt purposes. And no doubt it was all for the best, anyway, for there would be no more such expenses now, and the notes would soon be paid. After that they could carry out their original plan.

Mrs. Mason spoke cheerfully, but her lip quivered, and Mason was greatly distressed as she hurried away to her room, where she could be alone with her disappointment. Nor did he find that expenses stopped, as he had expected. It seemed to be the general impression that, because he was an

alderman, he had a lot of money, and could afford to be free with it. He was expected to put his name to every subscription paper circulated; he was called upon for contributions to help along every conceivable cause; he was asked to buy ball tickets, benefit tickets, prize fight tickets, and church fair tickets; he was appealed to for aid by the poor as never before, and he had previously been considered a generous man so far as his means allowed. His wife, always sympathetic, had given as much of her time as she could spare from her home and children to those who were in distress, but now she was asked to give more. And there was a noteworthy change in the tone of those who applied to either husband or wife for anything: it was now demanded as a right, while before it had been asked as a favour. Mason found that, in very truth, he was a servant of the people. If he desired to give freely, he could be generously patronising in his method of doing it, and so seem to be the master rather than the slave, but it would be only a pretence. He could rule, if he chose, but he could rule only by bowing to the wishes of those he would rule. He could buy their political obedience, but he could have it on no other terms. Of course, this does not mean that the purchase price would necessarily be cash.

Now, Mason had a theory of political success, evolved from his own observation in part, and in

part from the comments and criticisms of Darnell. Since his nomination, Mason had given some thought to Baxter and his methods, and Darnell had studied others. Baxter had been the poor man's friend; he did not confine his work to the Council, but looked after his constituents. He turned no one from his door; the woman in need and the man in trouble found him ever ready to hear their stories and to help them. He knew all that was going on in the ward; he was one of the people; he went among them; he made their interests his interests. He exerted himself to get a good job for the son of a poor widow, he interceded with the landlord for a family that was in hard luck, he pressed a claim against the city for a man who had been injured by a defective sidewalk, he secured the repaving of a business street, and he did favours for the merchants. In fact, he made himself so popular and almost indispensable to the ward that he was enabled to do about as he pleased in the Council. What he made out of corrupt measures was nothing to his constituents; it was what he did for them that counted, and they continued to reelect him, even after he had become absolutely notorious.

"But why cannot an honest man be just as popular?" was the question that Mason asked himself, and Darnell unconsciously helped him to answer it.

"You've got a great chance, Mason," Darnell said, "but you've got to take a lesson from the gangsters, if you're going to make the most of it. You've got to look out for your people. Baxter used to give them a turkey dinner Thanksgiving Day, and then go down and steal the roof off the city hall. The dinner wasn't absolutely necessary, and the theft wasn't necessary at all, but he proved he was their friend. I don't see why a man can't prove he's their friend and be honest, too."

"No more do I," returned Mason.

"But the average reformer never does it," asserted Darnell. "He's so busy being honest that he hasn't time for anything else. The minor individual interests of his constituents are too insignificant to hold his attention. His business is at the city hall and not in the ward, and he is so full of his own schemes that he can't see their needs, except in the aggregate. His intentions are all right, but his methods are all wrong. He goes on the theory that he is a superior being, which may be right, but he proves that he is an inferior politician. He is in the clouds, and they want a man who is very much down on the earth."

"I guess they'll never find me in the clouds," laughed Mason, "for I've been down on earth with them too long. My reputation in that line is already established."

In truth, it did seem as if Mason now had his opportunity. He was already a popular man when he began his official career, and he had what seemed to be good, practical ideas for retaining his popularity. But many of the demands made upon him were of a nature he had not expected. For instance, he was asked to get a railroad pass for one of the small merchants of the ward, who gave a little attention to politics.

"But what have I to do with railroad passes?" asked Mason.

"Oh, you can get one all right," was the answer. "The railroads are always having dealings with the Council, and they are mighty careful how they refuse an alderman. Baxter used to do it."

"If I get a pass," said Mason, "I will be putting myself under obligations to the road that issues it, and, when that road wants anything of the Council, I am likely to find myself in a mighty awkward position. I can't afford to do it."

The man looked surprised and grieved.

"If it was a charity matter," Mason added, "there might be some excuse for it, but you can afford to pay fare. I wouldn't ask for a pass for myself, and I won't ask for one for you."

The man departed, resentful. Mason, he said, was not the right kind of a man for the place, and it was a certainty he would not hold it long.

Then there was a man who wanted a peddler's license without charge. The cost of such a license was ten dollars, but, in exceptional cases, to enable a poor man to get a start, it was customary to remit the fee. As a result of this practice, there had been a scandal, and only a short time before the fact had been made public that there were at that date more than a thousand outstanding licenses of this sort, for which the city had not received a penny. They all had been issued on the recommendations of aldermen, and it was notorious that nine-tenths of them were in the hands of men well able to pay. Mason reminded the applicant of this.

"You are able to pay," he urged.

"But I don't want to," returned the man.

"Well, I guess you'll have to this year," asserted Mason.

"Oh, no, I won't," said the man. "There's another alderman from this ward."

Mason was absolutely right, but another friend was lost, and another man was telling people that the new alderman was "a great big bluff, too proud to help those who had helped him."

He was called upon to arrange for twenty-five dollar wagon permits in the same way, also, in addition to being asked to secure sidewalk privileges that were contrary to the ordinances.

"Those ordinances are not enforced, except where there is no influence," he was told.

"But they ought to be," he insisted. "I wasn't elected to arrange for violations of the law."

Again he was right, but again a friend was lost.

It seemed to him, however, that the limit of endurance was reached when he was asked to interfere with the administration of justice. He had refused other requests, stating his reasons, but he had not lost his temper. He was asked to secure a Bridewell pardon.

"If there has been a miscarriage of justice," he said, "I will present the facts to the mayor."

But there had been no miscarriage of justice; it was a mere case of a prisoner who was "useful," and consequently had friends who could be of use to both him and the new alderman.

"Baxter got him out once before," the friends urged. "Baxter was mighty good about that. Of course, he couldn't always get pardons for even the 'right people,' but he always tried."

"I don't give a damn what Baxter did!" cried Mason, angrily. "I won't use my position to save a man from the punishment he deserves, and this fellow ought to be in the Bridewell, according to your own story. He is guilty of the offence charged, and he has been there before; let him stay there. I wouldn't have the nerve to ask for his pardon,

even if I wanted to, and I don't want to. But I do want one thing distinctly understood: I don't represent the lawless and criminal element of this ward, and I won't stand, or attempt to stand, between it and punishment. I wasn't elected for that purpose, and, by God! I won't identify myself with any such business!"

This was after he had been asked, and had refused, to intercede with a police justice in behalf of two men who were notoriously disreputable characters, but also "useful," so his indignation was greater than otherwise might have been the case. But that did not lessen the anger of those to whom he addressed his emphatic remarks. They were convinced that he was not the man for the place, and they had no hesitation in saying so. He had no sympathy for the poor. In the slum wards of a great city "sympathy for the poor" is made to cover much of evil, especially with the minor practical politicians.

Alderman Mason was rapidly losing much of his popularity. Somehow the Baxter methods did not seem to work satisfactorily, when tried by a man of principle.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SOME FAVOURS GRANTED

THOSE who did not ask what could not be conscientiously granted, found Mason most obliging; but, even with the best intentions, he found that "aldermanic courtesy" prevented him from being as useful as he had hoped to be. At the beginning he was reasonably successful. There were minor favours to be secured through the passage of "orders," and the majority of aldermen seemed to consider it proper "courtesy" to put them through, unquestioned, at the request of a colleague. They were for needed street repairs, for sidewalk privileges, or the right to put up an overhanging sign, for some trifling, and often proper, favour. They are the little things that show an alderman is giving attention to his ward.

Mason was as anxious as any other alderman to be of use to his constituents in a legitimate way, but he scrutinised these orders closely before presenting them, and he supposed other aldermen did the same thing. For his part, he refused to present several, which seemed to be in the nature of giving

privileges that either should not be given at all, or, if given, should bring some compensation to the city. Those that he did present were put through promptly by unanimous consent — at first. Then Mason made the mistake of investigating the orders introduced by other aldermen — just as he investigated everything on which he was asked to take official action — and he found many for which he could not conscientiously vote. “Aldermanic courtesy” was made to cover direct violations of the ordinances, and sometimes petty steals that he could not countenance. He voted against some of them, and after that he never got one of his own orders through without a fight, and frequently not even then. Unanimous consent was always refused, and everything he brought up was questioned and opposed.

“It’s a perfectly proper order,” he urged on one occasion.

“Well,” was the significant reply of another alderman, “you voted against the one I introduced last week. You can’t get favours here, if you don’t give them.”

“But my order would bear the closest scrutiny, and yours wouldn’t,” protested Mason. “Why, the moment the nature of yours was made plain there were a dozen aldermen who dared not vote for it.”

“If I let you run the business in your ward, I

expect to be allowed to run the business in mine," retorted the alderman. "You don't want to be too inquisitive, or you'll get into trouble. It won't work in the Council."

"Reciprocity" was carried to the extreme. A man might properly oppose an ordinance, but an order that concerned only one ward was held to concern only the man who introduced it. Other aldermen were expected to shut their eyes and blindly accept his assurance that it was "all right," and, in return, he would be equally generous with them. So far as Mason could see, there was hardly an unselfish act done in the Council; a "return" was expected for everything, and, just as soon as it was discovered that he purposed to consider all propositions on their merits, his usefulness to his ward was ended. He could accomplish practically nothing. Indeed, the other alderman from his ward frequently secured what had been denied to him. Mason would ask for unanimous consent to pass an order, and it would be refused. He would wait for it to come up in the regular order of business, and his colleagues would find pretexts for delay. When it finally came up, he would be bombarded with questions and insinuations, and, as a general thing, his purpose would be defeated. A week later precisely the same order would be introduced by the

other alderman from the Eighth, and it would be put through in two minutes.

Naturally, this hurt Mason — it was intended that it should — and it was not unusual to hear the remark, “No use asking Mason to look after that; he hasn’t any more friends than a yellow dog with a tin can tied to its tail. He simply ‘queers’ everything that he takes up. His friendship is more hurtful than his enmity.”

Still, it could not be denied that Mason did his best, and in some things he was successful, but he was frequently inclined to protest. He found, among other things, that he was expected to be the errand-boy of the ward. Whenever possible, those who had business to transact at the city hall endeavoured to put it off on the alderman; and, even if they had to go in person, they expected him to go along in order to expedite matters. In some instances this was done with the very apparent expectation that he would secure exemption from fees. People who would not make a direct request chose this method of testing him.

He was asked once to see about a dog license. There was no reason why the man who sought this favour should not have looked after the matter himself — his time was no more valuable than Mason’s — but he was under the impression that Mason could get it for nothing, and, as he put it,

"he won't have the nerve to make me pay." That is where he misjudged Mason. The latter did the errand, but he paid the fee, and, when he came back, he collected it from the man who wanted the license. Thereupon the man immediately jumped to the conclusion that Mason was pocketing the fee himself.

"He's on the make," he grumbled. "He never had to pay anything for that license."

He was the more convinced of this when he learned that Mason had got a dog license for a poor woman, and had informed her that there was no charge in her case. But, as a matter of fact, Mason had paid for that license out of his own pocket, and had refrained from collecting, owing to the poverty of the woman. Still, the man was disgruntled. Mason had done a favour and had lost a supporter.

In another instance, the new alderman was asked to go with a young man who wished to get a marriage license. There was no question of escaping the fee in this instance. The youth feared a lot of red tape, and thought the presence of the alderman would simplify matters, in addition to giving him moral support and encouragement. So Mason went.

He also went with a delegation from the ward to see about certain proposed improvements — but this he considered legitimately in the line of his duty —

and he interceded for a man who was about to be dropped from the city payroll. Here again he believed that he was justified, and was glad to do it. The trifling errands were what annoyed him. He seemed to be at the beck and call of every man and woman in the ward. He was expected to see about permits of all kinds, get dogs out of pound, referee family quarrels, and even try to straighten out tax tangles. In the first month of his term he was called upon to secure employment for at least forty men, all of whom preferred to work for the city, but were willing to take something else, if the hours were short and the pay good. And he did the very best he could for all that really seemed willing to work. He was especially active in securing places for boys, who would be likely otherwise to run wild and get into mischief.

"But," he complained, ruefully, "I never knew before that an alderman was supposed to be an employment agent for his ward. It's taking about all my time, and even then I seldom get thanks."

He was making all that he could honourably out of the Baxter method of acquiring and retaining popularity, but that was not much. The distinctions he made between right and wrong, the proper and the improper, were a sad disappointment to his unreasoning constituents. In a word, he had too fine a sense of honour and duty for his position and his

surroundings. As an illustration of this, one particular case may be cited.

A poor woman came to him with a sad tale. Her husband had been arrested and fined that morning, and she wanted to have the fine suspended.

"The jedge'll do it fer you, I know he will," she pleaded. "He ain't been took away yet, an' if you hurry you kin get him off on one o' them suspended fines, like the last time."

"If he was let off on a suspended fine once," explained Mason, "he has a double fine to work out now."

"It wa'n't the same jedge," urged the woman, "an' th' p'lice don't remember it. This jedge always lets 'em go when an alderman asks him to. An' I'm all alone, with only my boy an' no man to get the money fer coal an' food."

"How old is your boy?" asked Mason.

"Fifteen," answered the woman.

"Is he working?"

"No."

"In school?"

"No."

Mason was thoughtful for a few minutes. He was sorry for the woman, but he knew something about the man.

"I'd like to help you," he said at last, "but I can't do it the way you want. I won't even attempt

to interfere with the proper administration of justice. But I will get a job for your boy, if there's one to be had in the city, and, from what I know of your husband's habits, the boy will make more in a year, even if his wages are small."

"I'm afraid," said the woman, hesitatingly, "that Jimmy won't work."

"Bring him here, and we'll see," returned Mason.

The woman brought the boy, and then Mason sent her away.

On that day Jimmy had dealings with an alderman of a class that was entirely new to his experience, and the alderman had influence. Jimmy was both afraid and pleased. He was not a bad boy at heart, but he had been neglected, and in consequence had fallen among bad associates. Mason talked to him frankly and earnestly.

"If you'll work," he said, "I'll help you; if you won't, I'll see that you find your way to the Juvenile Court, which was established to look after just such boys as you. Then you'll either go to an industrial school, where you'll learn to work, or you'll be put in charge of a probation officer."

Mason said much more, in which there was both kindness and severity — and an alderman is a pretty big man to the boys of some wards.

"Where'll I have to work?" asked the boy.

"Right here, at first," answered Mason. "I'll

start you in my store, where I can look out for you, and, if you do well, I'll see if I can get you a better chance later. But you've reached the end of your loafing."

"All right," said the boy. "I'll work for you."

He went home, showing some evidence of pride. If he had to work, there was at least honour in working for the new alderman, who had proved himself such a big man in the campaign.

The boy's mother was pleased and — dissatisfied. She was a hard-working woman, but ignorant. She was glad that her boy was going to work, for she knew he had been getting into bad ways. She was grateful to the alderman for what he had done, but —

Why was he so mean as to refuse to get her husband out?

Mason was unable to satisfy, even when he did a really good act. He had done her a greater favour than she had asked, but there would have been no alloy in her gratitude if he had done less by merely getting her worthless husband out of the clutches of the law. A "gang" alderman would have accomplished more for himself, while showing less real sympathy for the woman, and less thoughtfulness for her future. He would have given her a dollar or two for her immediate needs, and then

proceeded to send back to her a husband who was worthless a good part of the time.

As for Mason, after learning more of her predicament, he merely sent her the boy's wages for one week in advance. He lacked the knack of securing the best results for the least investment.

And the Old Man watched and waited. Not a detail escaped his attention. He had learned to understand Mason—at least, so he thought—and he knew he could not be managed as some others were managed. But the Old Man smiled grimly as reports were brought to him month after month. The time was coming when he alone could work out Mason's salvation, and then he would exact his price. It was a saying of his that "every man has his price," and by price he did not necessarily mean a cash price. He knew that some men are more easily bought in other ways.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN DARNELL'S WARD

WHILE Mason was deep in the problems peculiar to his ward, Darnell one day called for him with his automobile. Their friendship was as strong as ever, but since the election they had been less in each other's company. Each read with deep interest what the papers had to say of affairs in the other's ward, and they exchanged greetings and occasional reminiscences on Council nights, but, for the most part, their ways now lay apart. The ward problems that beset them were entirely different — as different as the character of the wards. Darnell, as was natural, was having a much easier time.

"But I want you to see what I'm doing," he told Mason. "I'm rather proud of my record, for I certainly have waked the people up over there."

"I've heard of it," answered Mason.

"Well, it will do you good to see it," asserted Darnell. "You've been having your own troubles over here, I understand, and it won't do you a bit of harm to leave them behind for awhile."

On the way Mason outlined some of his woes.

"I'm doing the best I can," he explained, "but I'm satisfied that I'm losing ground every day. I can't conscientiously or honourably do half that I'm asked to do."

Then he recited some of the demands made upon him, and told how utterly impossible it was to give any attention to his business and at the same time heed the requests of his constituents.

"I have no time for my own affairs," he said. "I have to pay for a man to take my place in the store, and, under his management, I notice that trade is falling off. I honestly believe, Darnell, that at the end of the year my aldermanic salary will not make up the difference in profits at the store — certainly not, after deducting from the salary my additional expenses."

"Well, you didn't go into this solely as a money-making venture," remarked Darnell.

"No-o," answered Mason, slowly. "I intended, and still intend, to do the very best I can for the ward and the city, but I'm not financially able to pay much for that privilege. That's where the trouble comes, Darnell. You can't appreciate it, because you're so differently situated."

"I appreciate it sufficiently to see where the temptation comes to the poor man in political life," said Darnell, thoughtfully. "Now, I have made myself

reasonably popular in my own ward, but I can see that the cost of this is going to be in excess of my official salary."

They had reached Darnell's Twenty-fourth Ward office, concerning which the papers had had much to say, and Mason put aside his own problems in order to give his undivided attention to Darnell's innovations. The ward office was an entirely new departure, but it had proved a most popular one. From 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. any resident of the ward could have attention there. Complaints and suggestions were recorded, and all the affairs of the aldermanic office were conducted according to strict business principles.

"I am here myself from ten to twelve," explained Darnell, "and I have a clerk on duty here all day. If anything in the ward needs attention, all that a citizen has to do is to drop in here and say so. The clerk will make a note of it, and I will give it prompt consideration. If any man or any delegation wishes to discuss ward improvements with me, I have my office hours, and they know when and where to find me."

"It's a great idea!" ejaculated Mason. "It ought to please them."

"It does," answered Darnell.

"They'll be running you for mayor next."

"Well, I don't know," returned Darnell. "For

the most part, they don't seem to associate me with affairs of any moment. I don't believe you can guess the notice that is left here with the greatest frequency."

"I don't believe I can," admitted Mason. "What is it?"

"It's a notice to the effect that some ash-can hasn't been emptied by the city contractor."

"And what do you do then?" asked Mason.

"I have the clerk call up the Street Department on the telephone and lodge a complaint. Do you know, people telephone me about these things when it would be just as easy for them to telephone the proper official at the city hall?"

"Perhaps they think a complaint from an alderman will receive attention quicker."

"I suppose there is something in that," said Darnell, "but I venture to say the Health and Street Departments are called up from this office on trifling complaints half a dozen times a day six days in the week. Still, I have no cause to complain. I started this office with the idea of transacting the business of the ward right in the ward so far as possible, and they tell me at the city hall it has been considerable of a relief. We can sift out the fool ideas and complaints here, and transact the necessary business with less friction and more economy of time. Personally, I think the plan ought to be

adopted in every ward, so that only those things would reach the city hall that really ought to get there. It would save time and trouble, for much of the business can be settled right here."

"If all aldermen were situated as you are, it might be possible," suggested Mason.

"Oh, I readily understand that it isn't possible now," admitted Darnell. "An alderman must be paid to devote his entire time to the city before such a plan would work. But I know, from my own experience, that it would simplify matters greatly. There's so much that concerns a ward alone. Why, there's hardly a day passes that I don't have some sort of a conference of real value here during my office hours. It's so easy to drop in here with a suggestion, and it keeps me advised as to the needs of the ward and the feeling of the people. I am in touch with every one, and a movement that would slumber under ordinary conditions is easily started and given headway. Occasionally men meet here by appointment to discuss ward affairs among themselves and with me. In a way, this office is a clearing-house."

Mason had listened to Darnell with growing enthusiasm. They were seated in the little private office back of the main office, and every word of the explanation had been absorbed by the alderman from the Eighth.

"By George!" he exclaimed, at last, "I believe you have evolved a new detail of civic government that sooner or later will be adopted generally. It's business; that's what it is — business — and you're entitled to more credit —"

"Oh, no; I'm not," interrupted Darnell.

"Who, then?" asked Mason.

"If I told you," laughed Darnell, "you'd think the suggestion came from a most extraordinary source. I doubt if you'd think it possible that such a thoroughly practical political idea could come from such a quarter, and I'll admit that you'd seem to be justified. Now," he added, hastily, as if anxious to change the subject, "we'll make a round of the ward."

After many tribulations, Mason's old smile had returned. It seemed to him as if it were the first chance he had had to smile since the campaign first became strenuous. But, now, his own trials were forgotten. He was lost in admiration of Darnell, the ever ready and resourceful. And he thought he detected something significant in his words. Mason was slow of thought, but now and then he had an inspiration. He suddenly recalled his wife's reference to her conversation with Miss Hadley at the Darnell dinner, an incident that had slipped his mind. So he smiled as he climbed into the automobile with Darnell.

For an hour or more they rolled through the streets and the alleys, principally the alleys, and Darnell made voluminous notes. Once, when they came to a place where some men were digging trenches to lay some pipes, he got out and had a talk with the foreman.

"You're blocking the whole street," said Darnell.

"What's that to you?" asked the foreman, insolently.

"A good deal," answered Darnell. "There's no excuse for it, and it's got to be stopped. You can leave half the street clear as well as not, and, if you don't, there will be some one up here to make you in about fifteen minutes. I've had three complaints of this already."

"Who are you?" asked the foreman, somewhat troubled by Darnell's tone of authority.

"One of the aldermen from this ward," answered Darnell, "and, if you don't clear half the street and keep it clear, you'll hear from the city hall."

The men were at work clearing the street within five minutes, for Darnell had acquired a reputation that made offenders rather anxious to heed his suggestions.

"Well, you certainly look after this ward!" exclaimed Mason, in admiration. "Do you do this every day?"

"No," answered Darnell; "but I go over the

ward at least once a week, and sometimes twice. It has a good effect, too. Work is done here better and more expeditiously than ever before. I've had some of the garbage men hauled up, and they're not neglecting their work as they once did. I've made a little trouble for some dilatory paving contractors, too. In fact, I'm trying to give the ward the personal attention that I would, if it were my property."

"You're an ideal alderman," asserted Mason.

"I believe the newspapers have said something to that effect," returned Darnell, with a smile, "but I'm trying to be another kind of an ideal."

Again Mason recalled what his wife had said about Miss Hadley, and his smile was more in evidence than ever.

"I admit that I am doing more than other aldermen in systematising ward business," Darnell went on, "but my opportunities are greater. Few could afford to do this, even if they wished; but I think the city would profit, if it had fewer aldermen, and put those few in a position to do business in this way."

"I'm sure of it," asserted Mason.

"And yet, I must admit that I'm selfish in the matter," said Darnell. "I didn't want the nomination, and I hadn't planned anything of this sort when I accepted. The plan has been evolved grad-

ually, and my thoughts have not been entirely on the ward as it has been evolved."

The automobile slowed up, and Darnell pointed to a big vacant lot, equipped with swings, a baseball diamond, and a tennis-court.

"There is one of my playgrounds," he said. "I've found places for three such in the ward. The land for two of them belongs to my father, and a friend gave me the use of the third. Even in this ward we have children who are sadly in need of play-room, and why not give them the use of vacant land?"

"Why not?" repeated Mason.

"Of course, I had to fit them up myself, and there is another illustration of the advantage I have over most aldermen. But the city could do something of this sort at small expense. My experience shows that there would be no difficulty in getting the necessary permission from landowners."

"Your own idea?" asked Mason, quizzically.

"In this instance, yes; but it wasn't exactly the ward that set me to thinking of these things."

"Why don't you marry her?" asked Mason, suddenly.

Darnell flushed, and, for a moment, seemed on the point of making an angry retort. Then he thought better of it, and laughed.

"You're not so slow as I thought you were,

Mason," he said, "but — but — Well, she's a wonderful girl, Mason, and I guess I've been more or less of a fool."

"How?"

For a few minutes Darnell remained buried in thought. Then he utterly ignored the question.

"What little law business I have is suffering," he said, "but I can afford to let it suffer, and I want to demonstrate something."

"For your own satisfaction?"

"Well, it wasn't for that originally, but I guess it is now."

When Mason reached home, he repeated this to his wife.

"Well, I guess it isn't," she asserted, with feminine intuition.

"Isn't for his own satisfaction?"

"Certainly not. Why, if the Twenty-fourth Ward knew the truth about these reforms, do you know what it would do?"

"What?"

"Erect a statue."

"Of Darnell?"

"No; of Miss Hadley."

CHAPTER XXV.

WATCHING THE QUARRY

THERE were many people watching Mason ; there were a few watching Darnell.

State Senator Pepper wished to be returned to Springfield, and Mason could help him, if he would. There were indications that he would not, but in politics there is always the possibility that a man may be brought into line. Still, Mason had refused absolutely to exert his influence to save certain men who were drawing pay from the city and working for the Senator. The desired result had been secured through other influences, but that did not make the Senator any more kindly disposed toward Mason. However, there were rumours to the effect that "the right people" were getting a grip on the alderman, and that he might yet be expected to experience a change of heart.

The Old Man was interested in the Independent Gas measure, and Mason's vote was imperatively needed for that. The Old Man's interest, as previously explained, was political rather than finan-

cial. Certain men who could help him wished that measure put through. Indeed, it was current gossip that there were men at Springfield who would profit from it, and that, in payment, they would help out the Old Man with certain legislative favours that he sought. Then, too, some of the capital behind the gas measure came from an outside county that the Old Man wished to control at the next election for the legislature. The Old Man was ambitious. There were those who said that he was actually foolish enough to think he could pull the wires so as to reach the United States Senate. The legislature was not so strongly Republican that a few surprises in an off year might not give a Democrat a chance, and the Old Man was strong on unexpected moves. Still, this was only rumour. He might have an entirely different object in view; but for something he was surely reaching, and the gas measure was a means to an end. So he had Mason sounded from time to time, and also Darnell. The results were not satisfactory, and he continued to postpone the move he contemplated. No one knew just who was behind this ordinance, and there had been one scandal in relation to it already. It seemed to be giving a great deal for practically nothing. There was not even a certainty that it was not purely a sand-bagging scheme to hold up the existing gas com-

pany. So Darnell and Mason both insisted that they would have to know more about it, and that its terms would have to be changed so as to give greater compensation to the city, before they would vote for it.

“But they may change their minds,” said the Old Man, sententiously. “There is time enough yet.”

The Old Man was willing to wait, but he was not idle while he was waiting. He did not expect to do much with Darnell, but he watched Mason closely, significantly remarking that “there are ways of reaching practically any living man.”

Then there was the Suburban Railway franchise, in which Alderman Bayler and Bob Howe had an indirect interest. Howe was not an alderman, and had no vote, but he was a good political promoter, and his services were said to have been retained on a contingent fee. Bayler was the man who had charge of the ordinance in the Council.

Here again the question of compensation was the main thing. The owners of an existing street railway were behind the new franchise, and one of them was quoted as saying that they could not afford to pay both the city and the aldermen. There was no question of sandbagging in this measure; it was really intended to construct the road as a feeder to the main line, and there was sufficient need for it to make a good argument to obscure

the compensation issue. That alone was where it was faulty, and on that Mason balked. Some really conscientious aldermen voted for it when an attempt was made to rush it through, but Mason would not, and it was defeated. After a wait, it was decided to try it again in slightly changed form, and Howe and Bayler were watching for some opportunity to make Mason "see the error of his ways," as they expressed it.

"But they're on a dead card," asserted Jim Casey, who saw and heard enough to draw his own inferences. "It makes me laugh, it do f'r a fac', to think iv th' way thim wise lads had it come over thim be a felly that niver was in th' game before. He made thim put him through, an' now he's makin' thim walk th' carpit, wondherin' what they'll do with him. What w'u'dn't they give f'r Baxter now!"

"Well," returned Tom Lewis, to whom these remarks were addressed, "by rights, Baxter ought to have gone back, only we couldn't afford to risk trying to put him through. Baxter had three terms, and he ought to have had four."

"Sure," acquiesced Casey.

"A handy man like Baxter is entitled to four terms."

"In the pinitintinary," added Casey.

"You seem to like Mason," suggested Lewis,

deeming it unwise to take offence at any of Casey's characteristic caustic remarks.

"I like both iv thim lads," answered Casey. "I like anny wan that's a good fighter ag'in' odds. Ye don't expict me to be wastin' me sympathy on th' Ol' Man an' Howe an' Pepper, do ye? They're not needin' it. F'r that matther, I don't see that Mason is, either, but annyhow, me sympathy or me cheers is f'r th' felly that's makin' th' up-hill fight. I tell ye how I feel f'r thim: If th' Ol' Man sh'u'd come in here, I'd pass th' time iv day with him like I w'u'd with anny wan; but, if that felly Mason, that put thim all in th' soup, comes in, I'll sing out, 'Hurroo!' I will sure."

"Well, it won't be long before he'll need your sympathy more than your cheers, Jim," said Lewis, warmly.

"Will he, now?"

"That's what he will."

"Accordin' to me mimory," returned Casey, "I hear-rd some wan talkin' like that wanst before, an' 'twas not long afther that th' whole bunch iv ye was climbin' a three f'r to keep out iv th' way iv this poor harmliss lad, an' ye was offerin' him annything he wanted f'r th' chanst to come down. An' I'll tell ye wan more thing."

Casey, who had taken a strange fancy to both Mason and Darnell, was unusually emphatic.

"What's that?" asked Lewis.

"He's not like some iv th' others, f'r he's not th' kind iv a lad that makes people think shtripes sh'u'd be more gin'rally worn in th' city hall."

But Lewis spoke truthfully when he said that Mason would be more in need of sympathy than cheers a little later, for at that very moment events seemed to be conspiring to make trouble for him. A strange man was closeted with the Old Man.

"His credit is good," the stranger was saying.

"What do you mean?" asked the Old Man.

"I mean I had to pay principal and interest to date to get them, and it was hard work then," explained the stranger. "Not one cent off for the cash, and it took a week of negotiations and fairy tales to get them at that price."

"But you got them?"

"I certainly did."

"Well, you can see now why I wanted you to do the job. You're not known, and you could put it on a friendship or business basis. If there had been a hint of politics in it, they never would have let go of the notes."

The Old Man was thoughtfully silent for a few minutes.

"But, if they knew all that we know," he said, at last, "perhaps they would have been glad to let the notes go at a discount."

"I think they would," said the stranger.

"You found that my information was correct, didn't you?" asked the Old Man.

"Mr. Bell," returned the stranger, impressively, "you've got that fellow absolutely at your mercy. You can break him in just about twenty-four hours, if you want to. The fool gave demand instead of time notes, — because he was dealing with friends who wouldn't press him, I suppose, — and there's about three thousand dollars of his stock that was bought on time. His business is in worse shape than it ever was before; he has lost much of his popularity, and just a hint that you intended to force the collection of one or both of the notes would bring Wilkinson, Frazer & Co. down on him like a thousand of brick. They hold his paper for something like two thousand dollars for stock furnished, and they're mighty nervous as it is. This aldermanic business hasn't done him a bit of good in a business way."

"That's because he doesn't keep a saloon," said the Old Man, with a grim chuckle. Then, having had his joke, he became serious again. "It won't do for me to appear in this affair," he said. "I've put the weapon in your hands, and you know what to do with it. You know what your people want of him, I imagine."

"If I didn't, I don't think they would have trusted me in this matter."

"Well, I want to make one additional stipulation. The gas measure is of first importance, of course, but there are two notes. Perhaps you can land a vote for the street railway bill with one of them."

"I'll try it," said the stranger.

"It will help out Howe and some of the boys," explained the Old Man, "but that's only a secondary consideration. This was done for your people solely."

The stranger nodded to show that he understood.

"How about Darnell?" he asked, changing the subject.

"Doubtful," answered the Old Man, "but he'll begin to feel the screws pretty soon."

"It looks as if we could get along without him," said the stranger, "but it isn't certain. To be absolutely safe, we ought to have him."

"I have my eye on him," returned the Old Man, "and I can promise you that he'll find independence costly. I may get him yet. There's no hurry. Just let the ordinance slumber until we're ready."

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SYMPATHETIC FRIEND

MISS HADLEY had taken quite a fancy to Mrs. Mason when she met her at the Darnell dinner. The little woman was so earnest, so hopeful, so proud of her husband, and so frank and unconventional that the girl had found herself interested in the woman's modest ambitions. It was a refreshing relief from the conventionalities of society. While not wholly familiar with the customs of polite society, Mrs. Mason knew enough to call after being invited to dinner, and this gave Miss Hadley, who happened to make her dinner-call the same day, an opportunity to put their relations on an even more friendly basis. After that, all formalities were put aside.

Mrs. Mason, as usual, was full of her dreams, and fairly radiated enthusiasm; but, when Miss Hadley saw her in her modest little home later, her tone had changed. One of the children was sick, and at first Miss Hadley attributed this apparent depression to that fact. Before she left, however, she

had more than a glimmering idea of the truth. The effect of Mason's election had been the reverse of what had been expected. There was dissatisfaction, and the effect was felt in the household. Mrs. Mason's neighbours were telling each other of the things that Mason had refused to do "when he could have done them just as well as not." The story of the dog license for which he had collected was told with some amplification, and the impression prevailed that the alderman was "on the make" in a small, mean way. Other incidents, they held, tended to show that he was disobliging and selfish; he did not compare favourably with Baxter, and Baxter was not slow to take advantage of this.

"I never turned the people down as he does," said Baxter.

The men — that is, some of the men — growled about Mason, and their sentiments influenced their wives in the treatment of Mrs. Mason. This growing unpopularity was purposely fostered by some of those who were "playing the game of politics," too, for there are many ways of "reaching" a recalcitrant office-holder. Untruthful stories were told about him, and those that were true were perverted and distorted.

All this — or, at least, so much of it as she knew — Mrs. Mason told to Miss Hadley.

"I don't know all that's back of it," she said, "but they want him to do something, and he won't; and they can't believe he's honest. They think he's putting on airs, and that I am, too. Why, I've heard some of them speak of him as 'Goody-Goody' and 'the little tin god' and 'the smooth one,' and lots of other things like that. And they sneer at me, and even insult me.

"'I hope, Mrs. Mason,' a woman said to me the other day, when I was going to market, 'that your husband's ingrowing conscience won't prove fatal.'

"Another one hinted that he was too fine a man to bother the corporations, but that very likely my next gown would be paid for out of the money he made out of the ward. Of course, that isn't the way with all of them — only a few, really — but I just dread to go out. I'm sure to hear something unkind, or to be snubbed by some one. I still have friends, good friends, but they can't protect me from this, and I don't like to tell Joe about it. I know he's having enough trouble as it is." Then she added, plaintively: "Oh, I wish he'd never got into politics."

Miss Hadley was truly sympathetic, and so Mrs. Mason continued. She told how the children were bothered, as only children can be bothered by other children. They were taunted at school; they were

called "tin angels;" they were asked about the price of dog licenses; they were sarcastically told that their father was sprouting wings. In fact, the youngest came home weeping on several occasions.

"And I think that's what has made her sick," added Mrs. Mason.

There seemed to be nothing seriously wrong with the little one, but Miss Hadley's sympathies were aroused, and she came again a few days later, bringing some flowers. Then she found the child was really sick. The doctor said it was typhoid fever, which meant an anxious and wakeful time for the mother.

"I think you ought to have a trained nurse," said Miss Hadley.

"We can't afford it," answered Mrs. Mason, wearily. "Joe does as much of the watching as he can, and, if it wasn't for the housework, I'd be all right."

Miss Hadley was on the point of offering to get a nurse herself, but she thought better of it. Somehow she felt that the little woman's pride would resent such a suggestion. Yet she could not fail to see that, with this in addition to her previous troubles, Mrs. Mason was really worn out. Her husband did what he could, but never before had he had such demands made on his time, and never before had he been so worried about his business

affairs. The whole burden of the housework, and the main burden of caring for the sick child and attending to the ordinary needs of the well one, fell upon the wife.

The following afternoon Miss Hadley came again, and she dismissed her coachman at the door, with instructions to come back at eight o'clock that evening.

"*You* are to take a nap," she said, authoritatively, to Mrs. Mason.

"Me!"

"Certainly. Who else? I'm going to be nurse this afternoon. I've come prepared, and I've sent the coachman away."

She was, in truth, attired as simply as a trained nurse, even to the apron.

There were protests, but Miss Hadley would not heed them. She was going to stay, anyway, and she was going to look after the child. There would be absolutely nothing for Mrs. Mason to do, except to rest, and it would be very foolish of her not to take advantage of the opportunity. If she were needed, she would be called. Mrs. Mason surrendered, gratefully but hesitatingly. It would be a great boon to be relieved of responsibility — the responsibility that kept her half-awake even when she was trying to rest — for an hour, and, of course, she would sleep no longer than that.

Miss Hadley read to Mamie, the sick child, until the latter also slept. She entertained Harry, the well one, when he came in from play. She looked into Mrs. Mason's room a little after five, and found that weary woman sleeping peacefully. She set the table for supper, and investigated the kitchen, and, as she did so, she laughed.

"I think," she said, "I'll give Mr. Mason a surprise, if his wife only sleeps a little longer."

She did. She was in the dining-room when Mason came home, a little after six, but his was not the only step she heard in the hall.

"It was good of you to come over when you heard of Mamie's sickness," Mason was saying. "She a pretty sick little girl, but she was getting along all right this noon, and I'd have got word at the store if there'd been any change. But we'll get the very latest report now."

Miss Hadley would have run, but she couldn't. She was just putting a platter of cold meat on the table, and she still held it when the door to the dining-room opened, and Mason, followed by Darnell, appeared. Darnell saw her embarrassment, and he could not resist the temptation to take advantage of it.

"You have a new maid, I see," he said, maliciously. Then he was sorry, as well he might be. He thought Miss Hadley never looked better than

she did then; he certainly never had a greater admiration for her. But it was a poor moment for a joke. She was uncomfortable; she had been caught doing a good deed in an unconventional way; the situation was awkward. However, her woman's wit and pride came to her rescue, and, aside from a heightened colour in her cheeks, there was nothing to indicate that she was disturbed by the incident.

"Mrs. Mason is sleeping," she explained, in answer to Mason's anxious look. "She needed the rest."

Mason understood instantly, and so did Darnell, but neither said anything. Mason could not find words to express his gratitude, and there was nothing for Darnell to say. If Miss Hadley could have read the thoughts of the latter, however, there would have been a deeper red in her cheeks. He was thinking that nowhere else in the wide world was there so splendid a girl.

"I don't think I'd wake her for supper," suggested Miss Hadley. "Mamie is asleep, too, and Harry has been keeping me company in the kitchen."

Then Mason had an inspiration.

"Will you stay?" he asked, turning to Darnell. "It isn't much, for we have dinner at noon, but I'll be glad to have you."

"Thank you," said Darnell, and Mason brought another chair to the table and held it for Miss Hadley.

"Oh, I'm the maid," she said, with a glance at Darnell that made him feel like kicking himself; "and, besides, Harry and I have had all the supper we want already."

Mason tried to insist, but Miss Hadley was firm.

"Won't you please sit down?" she said.

Mason and Darnell took their places solemnly. The situation was funny enough, but Miss Hadley showed no disposition to laugh, and they dared not. She proved to be an ideal maid, silently attentive, speaking only when spoken to, and refusing to take any part in the conversation. If she hoped to make Darnell uncomfortable, she was wonderfully successful, but Mason shared in the discomfort.

When the door-bell rang, Mason jumped up to go, but sank back in his chair as he saw that the "maid" was ahead of him.

"What have we done to deserve this?" asked Mason, ruefully.

"You, nothing," returned Darnell, "but I have committed the crime of catching her dressed like a maid and joking about it. I seem to be always offending her. I don't believe she'd have cared a continental if it had been any one else."

"You don't?"

"No, I don't."

Mason pondered this for a moment.

"Women are queer creatures," he said, at last, "but I don't think that's such a bad sign."

Darnell was in a humour to give more of his confidence than usual. The conversation on the day of the automobile tour of the Twenty-fourth Ward had paved the way for this.

"She's said to be engaged," he remarked.

"Said to be!" repeated Mason.

Before Darnell could reply to this, Miss Hadley returned with the information that a poor woman wished to see the alderman, and Mason left them alone.

"Said to be!" repeated Darnell to himself, as if the phrase had given him a new idea. He recalled that the only information on the subject had come indirectly from Stanley Fisher. But Fisher certainly had interviewed Mr. Hadley, and—Well, he looked at the girl as if he would like to ask a question, but dared not.

"Miss Hadley," he said, "I—"

"I'm the maid," she interrupted, to indicate that the farce was still to be kept up.

"Oh!" he returned, with a smile that showed he saw his advantage. "Well, then, Josephine—"

"On second thought," she broke in, her cheeks flushing, "I don't believe I'll be the maid."

"In that case," he said, "we can talk more freely. Will you let me tell you something?"

"Isn't that Harry calling me from the kitchen?" she asked, moving toward the door.

"No, it isn't," he answered, desperately. "I'm the only one who's calling you. Won't you listen to me? You must know how hard I've tried to —" He meant to add "be your ideal," but she interrupted.

"And you've almost succeeded," she said, with her hand on the kitchen door.

"Succeeded in what?" he asked, hopefully.

"In — in being a man, with a man's determination and strength — and — and masterfulness. It's for woman to win and for man to conquer, to grasp, to compel —"

"What?"

"Success."

As she disappeared into the kitchen, he jumped up and followed to the open door, where he caught sight of her bending over the boy, Harry, who had fallen asleep with his head resting on the table.

"Josephine!" he exclaimed.

"I'm not the maid," she retorted.

"Miss Hadley," he said, "I waited in the hope that you would let me take you home."

She hesitated, but suddenly recalled the flowers he had given Miss Dale the first night of the new Council, and also his joke about the "maid."

"Such gallantry to the maid," she said, "might create comment."

"But you just said you weren't the maid!" he protested.

"And, anyway," she added, "the carriage is coming for me, with Mr. Fisher."

"Damn Fisher!" he cried, turning sharply away.

A lady usually expects an apology for such an outbreak in her presence, but Miss Hadley only laughed softly to herself. It seemed to please her.

And Fisher wasn't coming, either.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HANDICAP OF HONESTY

THE poor woman who had called to see Mason was in deep trouble. He knew her, and knew something of her story. Her little daughter had been killed by a trolley-car, and in her ignorance she had compromised the case with the company's claim agent for \$100.

"With poor Gracie lying dead in the next room, and no money in the house for the funeral," she wailed, "it seemed an awful lot, and I took it and signed the papers. I didn't know — how could I know? — and I didn't think they'd cheat a poor widow, when they'd killed her girl — a good girl, too, who gave what little she earned to help with the rent and such things."

"Cheat!" exclaimed Mason, wrathfully; "a claim-adjuster will cheat any one. That's his business. Why, the law gives you five thousand dollars."

"That's what the neighbours told me afterwards," said the woman, "and they said you could get it

for me. Mr. Baxter, when he was alderman, did as much for Mrs. Kelly once."

Mason explained to her that she had forfeited all legal claim when she signed the release that the claim-adjuster presented to her with the \$100, but he promised to see what he could do. It was such a contemptible piece of work that he did not believe the high officials of the company would sanction it. Nevertheless, he told her that he might not succeed.

"Mr. Baxter did," was her only reply to this.

When Mason got rid of the woman, he found Darnell on the point of leaving, and Darnell was in no very enviable frame of mind, although later some incidents of the conversation with Miss Hadley were recalled that seemed to be capable of a favourable interpretation. Just at that moment, however, his mind was on Stanley Fisher, and he was not happy. Mason decided that there had been a quarrel. But, to his surprise, he found Miss Hadley in the dining-room, smilingly happy.

"Darnell seemed to be put out about something," he suggested.

"I hope," said Miss Hadley, solicitously, "that you haven't inadvertently said anything to offend him."

Mason looked at her blankly, and then shook his head solemnly. He had decided long ago that

women were enigmas, but he never had found one as enigmatical as this.

"And I thought I was competent to give Darnell advice in this matter," he muttered.

Miss Hadley wished to try her hand at washing the dishes, but Mason would not hear of it.

"You've been very good to us," he said, "but, if you go too far, you'll make us positively uncomfortable."

"I'll compromise," announced Miss Hadley. "I'll let the dishes alone, if you'll agree to make your wife turn everything over to me, without protest, when I come again."

"I'll do it," said Mason, and, Mrs. Mason appearing at that moment, the compact was sealed. Miss Hadley, however, insisted upon putting Harry to bed before she left.

"It's the first real rest I've had since Mamie was taken sick," said Mrs. Mason, gratefully, as Miss Hadley was going to her carriage. "But I'm ashamed to have slept so long and left so much for you to do."

"It shows you needed the rest," returned Miss Hadley, "and I've enjoyed it, really I have."

Mason said nothing to his wife about the call from the poor woman, but the next day he called at the offices of the street railway company, and stated the case to the claim-adjuster. The claim-

adjuster informed him that he had settled the matter on strict business principles for the smallest amount possible, and that any further action would have to be taken by the legal department.

The attorney gave him close attention, but seemed to consider it a very ordinary affair, not at all out of the usual line. Apparently such cases were common in his experience.

"Personally, I am sorry for her," he said, "but officially I can only say that she has no further claim on the road. It is not a matter of sentiment, but of business. It is not our privilege to be generous with the stockholders' money."

"It is your privilege to be just," urged Mason.

"She has had justice — legal justice," answered the lawyer.

"But not moral justice," insisted Mason.

"We did not compel her to sign the release," the lawyer argued, ignoring the thrust. "We made no threats. She was free to do as she pleased, and she signed it. She needed the money, and we gave it to her."

"You took advantage of both her necessities and her ignorance!" exclaimed Mason, angrily. "You knew her rights and she didn't. You defrauded her deliberately, even though it was done under the cloak of the law."

"Be careful, Mr. Mason," cautioned the lawyer.

"I mean what I say!" Mason asserted, warmly. "It was a fraud — not legal, perhaps, but moral certainly, and most despicable!"

"You make me hesitate to say what I intended," said the lawyer, quietly.

There was that in his tone that calmed Mason, and he waited to hear the proposition.

"Legally," explained the lawyer, "she has no claim against the road, for she has formally released us from further liability. That is business, and as a business affair the incident is closed. But for our friends we can sometimes stretch a point."

Mason looked puzzled.

"This woman," he said, "is hardly of sufficient importance to be considered either a friend or an enemy of the road."

"True," said the lawyer, "but how about you?"

Mason and the lawyer looked at each other, and Mason's face grew red. He knew that the franchise bill he had voted against would be up again.

"I ask this as a matter of justice, of humanity," Mason said, at last. "The woman is in want, in distress. Not only has she lost her child, but part of her small income as well. She is a deserving, hard-working woman — I know her."

"It rests with you to relieve her," said the lawyer, slowly and distinctly. "We cannot respond to all calls made on purely humanitarian grounds, but,

if you will authorise me to make this a personal request on your behalf, I will bring you a check for four thousand, nine hundred dollars, the balance of the five thousand the law allows — inside of five minutes. We are always anxious to treat our friends well."

Again their eyes met. This was a bribe-offer, but of such a nature that the possibility of it never before had occurred to Mason. In it there was nothing for him, except the thanks of the woman and the prestige it would give him in the ward, but it was a greater temptation than a personal bribe of ten times the amount would have been. He was being "reached" through the necessities of a poor woman. He was being tempted by his sympathy. And so cleverly was it all done that there was hardly a chance to resent it. Not an improper word; only a hint that meant an understanding. They would risk the money in the hope that he would live up to this implied agreement. They knew him, and knew that he would do it; he couldn't do anything else under the circumstances. How well the men who deal in human beings read human nature! There were men in the Council who would have to be bound down more securely, but the corporation lawyer was content, if only Mason would put the thing on record as a personal

favour to himself in view of his friendship for the road. There was no legally binding obligation, but there was a moral one, and this he could not escape.

It was a critical moment in his career. No one knew better than he how much success or failure would affect his political future.

"I have done nothing for which you should do this as a personal favour to me," he said at last.

"Not yet," said the lawyer, meaningly.

Mason's face was white. He was tempted to strike the man in front of him, but restrained himself.

"Nor will I put it on the grounds of friendship," he said. "I ask only justice for the woman."

The lawyer looked disappointed, but bowed gravely.

"I will present the matter to the directors," he said, "but I fear they will not be inclined to take a greater interest in this woman than you do yourself."

As Mason walked slowly along after he had left the company's office, it occurred to him that at no time in the conversation had the ordinance been mentioned, although there had been no possibility of misunderstanding the proposition.

"I never would have imagined," muttered Mason,

"that it could be done in that way. Lord! how hard they make it for a man to be honest in the Council! No wonder some fail."

Then he fell to wondering what sort of an effect this would have in the ward. What would the woman say? What would she tell her neighbours and friends? What would be their opinion? Baxter had succeeded in a similar case, and he had failed. He could readily understand how, and why, Baxter had succeeded, but the ward had neither time nor inclination to bother with reasons. It gauged men only by success or failure in those matters which directly concerned it, and he had failed.

"I guess I'd better make up my mind to be satisfied with one term in the Council," said Mason, bitterly, "but I'll talk this matter over with Darnell, anyway. I'd like to find out how it impresses him, and whether he would have taken a more aggressive stand."

Then his mind reverted to the other complications, and that night his wife found him very moody and silent. He was as considerate and as helpful as ever; he put Harry to bed to relieve her; he remained with Mamie while she was busy in the kitchen; he showed his pleasure when the doctor reported that all was progressing satisfactorily; but he could not conceal the fact that he was depressed.

Indeed, the doctor's presence brought up the thought, "Another bill!" and that occasioned a sigh.

In spite of all he could do, Mason was getting into a serious financial predicament, and he knew it.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRATEGICAL DEFEAT

"It's a damnable outrage!" exclaimed Darnell, when he had heard the story.

"What ought I to have done?" asked Mason.

"Just what you did," replied Darnell. "There was nothing else to do. It might have been some satisfaction to have knocked him down, but you couldn't have given an acceptable explanation of that afterwards. It was a bit of clever insinuation without a really tangible statement to resent."

"But what can I do now?" asked Mason. "That woman ought to have the money — she actually needs it the worst way — and I have a personal interest in getting it for her."

"I wonder," said Darnell, thoughtfully, "if the influence of two aldermen would make the case any stronger."

"Not unless the two aldermen were disposed to be friendly to the franchise measure, I imagine," returned Mason.

"Perhaps not," admitted Darnell; "and yet," he

added, "there's no harm in trying. Two of us demanding justice would strengthen the case somewhat, especially as the story of how the woman was defrauded would hurt, if it gets in general circulation."

"I wish Corbett could have heard the heartless way he talked about it," suggested Mason.

"By George! we'll take Corbett along!" cried Darnell; "and we'll pin that lawyer down. He'll have to go on record as a party to a heartless swindle or pay the woman what she should have; and he won't dare to even hint at conditions. If he refuses, Corbett will have what he calls 'a lovely story,' with all the facts at first hand."

"Just a little like blackmail, isn't it?" asked Mason, doubtfully.

"Not a bit of it," retorted Darnell. "We're only putting him on record. If he wants to do something that will reflect discredit on himself and his road, that is his business. Our motives are right, and we're willing the public should know where we stand. It makes my blood boil to think of a needy and ignorant woman being deliberately cheated, and I have an idea the public will feel much the same way about it."

Mason himself was quite ready to stretch a point, if necessary, to help the woman, and Corbett entered into the scheme with enthusiasm. It would,

he said, make "a lovely story," especially at this time, when the road was trying to get certain favours from the city. It could not fail to injuriously affect the prospects of the franchise measure.

"But," he said, regretfully, "I'll never get a chance to use the story, for the company will surely surrender. It can't afford to let anything like that get in circulation now. Why, we could describe the poor woman's plight and ask for subscriptions for the victim of a street railway company's greed. Wouldn't that stir up the public, though, and make the aldermen mighty shy of showing undue friendship for the corporation?"

However, Corbett misjudged the cleverness of the railway company's attorney. The latter grasped the situation the moment the three men entered his office. He knew Corbett, and greeted him warmly; he was cordial to Mason, and he expressed his pleasure when Darnell was introduced. But he froze up the moment the object of the call was mentioned.

"That matter is settled," he said, "and there is no occasion to reopen it."

"We think there is," insisted Mason.

"You will pardon me, Alderman, if I consider myself the best judge of my own business," returned the lawyer, coldly. "I must decline to enter upon any discussion of this affair. It is settled."

"Settled!" exclaimed Mason; "yes, but in what way?"

"That is something that concerns the company alone," said the lawyer.

"It concerns the whole public!" Mason insisted, excitedly. "It isn't necessary to discuss it, but I want to make a statement of the facts in your presence, so that there can be no dispute —"

"The incident is closed," interrupted the lawyer, firmly, "and I positively will not consider it further. If you have any statement to make, your newspaper friend doubtless will be glad to get it; it does not concern me, and I will neither listen nor correct it. I am not in the habit of submitting details of the business of this company to the judgment of outsiders."

He touched an electric bell button on his desk, and a clerk appeared, to whom he began giving instructions relative to office matters, thus arbitrarily putting an end to the interview.

"Well," said Corbett, rising, "I guess I have a story, anyhow."

Mason was furious, and Darnell was almost equally angry. They had received the hardest kind of a rebuff, when they felt that their cause was absolutely just.

"You are at liberty to publish it," said Mason to Corbett, "and I will supply any details that you

lack, and, if necessary, make affidavit to the truth of every word."

The lawyer ignored them, but, the moment they were gone, his tone and manner changed. He cut short the routine instructions he was giving the clerk.

"Do you know Baxter of the Eighth Ward?" he asked, sharply.

The clerk knew him by sight.

"Find him," ordered the lawyer, "and bring him here. Get a cab, and don't come back without him. It's of the utmost importance."

When the clerk had left, the lawyer leaned back in his chair and laughed softly to himself.

"They're too new to the business to corner an old hand," he said. "It's no trick at all to see through a game like that, and to checkmate it."

Baxter returned with the clerk, and was closeted with the lawyer for some time.

"You were a pretty good man in the Council, Baxter," said the lawyer. "Are you going to get back?"

"Sure," answered Baxter. "Mason has just about killed himself already."

"Well, I'll put you in a position to give him the finishing touches," said the lawyer. "To-morrow morning *The Recorder* will publish a sensational story of our heartless treatment of that Eighth Ward

woman whose child was killed. Mason is back of it, and will be freely quoted. Now, if we can make a fool of Mason, give you a little prestige, and put the road in a good light, I guess we will have accomplished something worth while, won't we?"

"Well, rather," answered Baxter; "but what's your plan?"

"If you get the money for that woman after Mason has failed, it ought to help you a lot in the ward," explained the lawyer. "If another paper is able to explode *The Recorder's* sensation on the very morning that it appears by publishing a facsimile of the woman's receipt for five thousand dollars, it ought to be glad of the chance to get at its rival so effectively. I told the men who were here that the matter was settled, but I didn't say how. I left them to draw their own conclusions. Now, if it was settled by full payment to the woman, it speaks well for the road."

Baxter — a man accustomed to sensational and brilliant, if tricky, political moves — was actually excited.

"Mason is as good as dead politically!" he cried. "You'll hit him going and coming, and the ward will be mine again, certain, sure."

"And if you make it?" significantly.

"I always know my friends, don't I?"

As Baxter was departing with the check for

\$4,900 and the receipt for the woman to sign, the lawyer remarked, casually, "By the way, Baxter, that receipt is dated yesterday. It will look better in the paper that way, and the woman won't bother about the date."

There were various comments when the two papers appeared the following morning — one with a sensational story of a corporation's deceit and heartlessness, and the other with proof of its generosity and justice.

"That settles me," said Mason.

"I think I'm seven kinds of a fool," said Darnell.

"I'll have a lot of trouble explaining this to McAuley," said Corbett.

"If the two aldermen had come to me in a gentlemanly way," said the lawyer, when he was interviewed for an evening paper, "I would have explained the matter to them, but I couldn't say anything, with dignity, in the face of threats and bullying."

"Mason could have done it as well as Baxter," the woman explained to her neighbours. "Baxter said so himself. But Mason is too high-toned for us poor people."

"He's a dead one," was the verdict of the ward.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PUTTING ON THE SCREWS

THE Old Man now deemed the time propitious for "putting on the screws." Politically, Mason was "in the ditch," but there was still a chance for him to crawl out, if he had an absolutely solid "machine" backing. True, even the "machine" might not save him, but there was nothing else that possibly could; it was his only chance. And, if he refused to come to terms, the "machine" could pile a commercial wreck on top of the other.

"We have him now where we want him," said the Old Man. "Get your ordinance ready. If we can't force it through now, we can't do it at all — until there's a new Council."

The Old Man played for large stakes, and he was both crafty and patient. He never gave up. If he couldn't handle one Council, he proceeded to plan for another that he could handle. But in this instance he made a mistake. Mason was desperate, but desperation did not make him tractable; in fact, it had a very opposite effect. He fully appreciated

his situation, and was almost ready to give up. Pepper, whom he had forced to secure reelection without his help, was his open enemy. His aldermanic record had hurt his business, and he was as good as out of politics. Partly because of his enforced neglect, partly because of his growing unpopularity with certain elements of the ward, and partly because of the deliberate machinations of those who had an object to gain, he had lost much patronage. Former customers passed him with a cold nod and went to a rival establishment. Merchants are quick to see an opportunity to secure trade, and there was now a rival store within a block of his place of business.

He had been longer than a year in the Council, and the notes he had given to raise money for his election expenses still remained unpaid. Somehow, with a much smaller income from the store and increased personal and family expenses, every cent had been needed. If truth were known, his salary as an alderman was little more than enough to meet the demands made upon him as the representative of the ward, the nature of which already has been explained. Baxter had spent considerable more than his salary in keeping the ward in line, and at the beginning Mason had been more generous than he could really afford to be. When he had tried

to economise, it was too late to recover the ground lost.

In despair he went to one of the men to whom he had given his notes, intending to be absolutely honest with him.

"I'm in a bad way," he said. "I meant to take up that note before this, but everything seems to have been against me. I have lost a good deal of my trade, and, as you doubtless know, I have sickness in my family now. Politics has been a costly thing for me."

"That's all right," returned the man, carelessly.

"Oh, I know you're inclined to be easy with me," said Mason, "and that makes me doubly anxious that you shouldn't lose anything. If I should be forced to the wall, you have only my unsecured note. Now, I'll tell you frankly that I'm in a pretty tight place, and, to make you safe, I'll give you a mortgage on my stock. I owe for some of it yet, but there's a good deal more than enough to protect you that's absolutely clear. That will make you all right, if Wilkinson, Frazer & Co., to whom the largest sum is due, come down on me unexpectedly."

"Now, you needn't worry about that note," explained the man. "It's in the hands of a friend of yours. He came to me more than six months ago, told me the predicament you were in, and said

he wanted to help you in a quiet way by putting that note where it couldn't possibly bother you until you were good and ready to pay it, so I let him have it. He said he could probably carry it for a long period with less inconvenience than I could."

"Who was the man?" asked Mason, astonished and startled.

"He said his name was Philip Harkins," answered the man.

"Never heard of him before," exclaimed Mason.

Then he hastened to see about the other note, and found that Philip Harkins had that, also.

It was Harkins, it is hardly necessary to say, who had reported to the Old Man about these notes, and had been told to let the matter slumber until the time was ripe for action. The Old Man was one of those who knew how to wait. He needed one more vote to put the gas measure through over the mayor's veto, and it was a certainty that the veto would have to be overcome. He had canvassed the situation thoroughly, but had found no one who could be readily brought into line. Even Darnell had been sounded, without success. No out-and-out proposition had been made to him, but he had been shown a possible political future that involved a seat in Congress, and perhaps higher honours later, if he made himself serviceable to "the right people." In view of his record, it was held that, with proper

backing, he could carry his Congressional district to a certainty, and the nomination was within the gift of the Old Man.

"My dear sir," Darnell had replied to the emissary, "if the district wants me, it will have to come after me. I don't believe in scrambling for office."

"I once knew a man who had that same theory," remarked the emissary.

"Well?"

"Well, he never got an office."

"That suits me," said Darnell.

"You don't want to go to Congress?"

"I don't. I've had enough of politics, and I'd rather go back to the task of working up a good law practice. The aldermanic nomination came to me unsought, and I accepted it, because — Well, I had my reasons. If I thought my services needed, perhaps I might accept another term in the Council, but I don't want to go to Congress, and I don't believe my father cares to have me. He has his own plans for my future, and these include working me gradually into the management of his property. It is largely for that I studied law, and for that I must remain in the city. I'm trying to do my duty, but I'm certainly not going to go out of my way to induce the district to give me something I don't want."

The emissary never even explained his errand,

but reported to the Old Man that Darnell was beyond reach. So success seemed to rest entirely on their ability to get Mason in line. It had been planned to put the ordinance through shortly after the organisation of the Council, but the Old Man saw that he would have to play a careful and a waiting game. "Wait!" was the word he gave the promoters. Premature action, he explained, would spoil everything. Mason had demonstrated his honesty and his independence previous to the election, and there was no use approaching him until they had him absolutely at their mercy. Even when the notes were secured he refused to permit a move to be made, for the trend of events showed that Mason would be in a still more desperate plight later. As everything had to be hazarded on one supreme effort, it would be foolish to take any risk. It naturally takes longer to play a game involving a fortune than it does to deal a poker hand.

But when the street railway company made its coup, the Old Man decided that the time had come for action, and Philip Harkins sought out Mason.

"You do not know me, Alderman," he said, "but my name is Harkins."

"You have two notes of mine," interrupted Mason, for he instantly recognised the name.

"Yes," admitted Harkins, surprised.

"Do you want them secured?" asked Mason.

"No; I want them paid."

"I can't pay them now," said Mason.

"I thought not," said Harkins; "that is, I was pretty well satisfied you couldn't pay them in cash."

Mason had learned to be quick at drawing inferences since he had got into politics, and his brow clouded.

"What kind of a devil's proposition have *you* got to make?" he demanded, angrily.

"None," answered Harkins, suavely. "My proposition —"

"Don't lie to me!" cried Mason. "You've got some disreputable scheme on hand, or you never would have bought those notes. I've been expecting you ever since I heard they were sold. What do you want?"

"Mr. Mason," said Harkins, with cold deliberation, for it was not his cue to be stirred to anger, "I represent two parties — the people behind the gas measure and the people behind the street railway franchise. Those two ordinances are coming up in the Council shortly. It rests with you to decide whether I shall destroy one or both of the notes in your presence the morning after these measures have been acted upon."

"You damned scoundrel, you want to bribe me, too!"

Mason was pale with anger.

"I have not said so," returned Harkins, quietly.

"No; you people never say anything that a man can get a grip on," retorted Mason, "but you mean it, just as the street railway people meant it, and I'll give you the same answer. By God! I'm not to be bought at any price! Now get out!"

"Have you stopped to think —"

"I've thought of everything. Get out!"

Harkins was backing slowly toward the door now, while Mason stood, gripping the back of a chair and restraining himself with an effort.

"If we sue these notes —"

"It will ruin me," broke in Mason. "It will bring other creditors down on me, and I'll be closed out in twenty-four hours. The railway people have killed me politically, and you can kill me commercially. Good Lord! don't you suppose I've counted the cost!"

"Well, perhaps the franchise isn't just what it ought to be," conceded Harkins. "But the gas measure alone can save you both commercially and politically. Your future —"

The chair to which Mason was holding went over with a crash, as he made a sudden rush for Harkins. The latter dodged into the hall, but Mason caught him by the collar just as he got the outer door open.

"Damn you!" cried the thoroughly enraged alderman, "I ought to kill you!"

He shook him violently, and then threw him out of the door and down the steps.

"I'll sue!" yelled Harkins, as he picked himself up and hurried away.

Mason made no reply. Turning back toward the little parlour in which the interview had taken place, he saw his wife on the stairs.

"Did you hear?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes," she answered, simply.

"I suppose it's just as well you should know now," he said, bitterly. "You'd have to know it in a day or so, anyway."

She came down the stairs and put her arms round his neck.

"Joe," she said, "you did just right, and I'm prouder of you than I ever was before."

She had wept for less on other occasions; now she smiled courageously and kissed him, and together they went up to the sickroom.

CHAPTER XXX.

MISS HADLEY'S COUP

THE little patient had progressed so far toward recovery that she was sitting up when Miss Hadley called the following day, but the little patient's mother showed evidence of mental stress. She had been courageous with her husband, but she was not so courageous when alone.

Miss Hadley's services as temporary housewife were no longer needed, but she felt that something was wrong, and she still called occasionally with flowers, books, and such appetising trifles as the patient was permitted to have. But on this occasion she gave her attention to the mother, and in time the latter responded to her sympathy by telling the whole story.

Miss Hadley left, perturbed. There could be no doubt that a crisis had been reached in the affairs of the Masons, and what could a girl do to help them? She knew enough of business affairs to realise that failure was imminent, almost certain, and it would probably leave Mason penniless. The explanation

of the situation showed her that a single suit meant that he would be closed out.

Miss Hadley went home, and retired to her own room. From her dainty little desk she took a little check-book, gazed thoughtfully at the balance, and shook her head. Her father believed that a woman should learn to care for and handle money, and, to this end, he gave her her own bank account and let her pay her own bills.

"If they mean to force him into a failure," she said, "it would do no good to offer part payment. And something must be done at once. It may be too late now."

She knitted her brows and thought deeply.

"I wish I had the moral courage to do it," she soliloquised. "It is very hard, and—sort of humiliating."

She looked at the clock. She had made a morning call at the Masons', and it now lacked ten minutes of twelve o'clock.

"It's a pretty poor sort of a friend," she said, "who cannot humble pride for friendship. I could never forgive myself."

She went slowly down-stairs to the telephone.

Mr. Darnell was there, the clerk at his ward office told her, but he was just preparing to leave.

Would Mr. Darnell be good enough to call on

Miss Hadley at once in relation to a very important matter?

Mr. Darnell would be there within fifteen minutes.

Then Miss Hadley was sorry she had sent for him, but she went back to her room and drew a check.

The summons delighted Darnell. Whatever the occasion, it was a favourable indication that she should send for him at all.

There being now no alternative, Miss Hadley carried the matter through with a pretty assumption of straightforward, businesslike methods. She explained briefly what she had learned that morning.

"I wanted to take up the notes myself," Miss Hadley concluded; "that is, I wanted you to do it for me, for I'm afraid they never would accept a direct loan from me. It would look to them too much like charity. But unfortunately I can't do it, although," she added, quickly, "I have half the money necessary."

She produced her check and looked at him, blushing furiously at this veiled appeal, even though it were made for another. She knew that he was Mason's friend, and she hoped that she would not have to say more than this. In fact, she could not have said more, if she had tried. To say this much had cost her a great effort.

"Miss Hadley," said Darnell, "Mason is my

friend, and he could have this much, or more, if he had asked for it. I suspected that something was wrong, I confess, but I did not know it was as bad as this."

"He felt a certain delicacy about it," explained Miss Hadley, "because you had paid more than your share of the campaign expenses. Mrs. Mason told me that. And, besides, a thousand dollars is a good deal of money to spare on short notice."

"It is more than I have available in cash," admitted Darnell, "but —"

"But between us," broke in Miss Hadley, with joyous excitement, "we can —"

"But I can easily get it," said Darnell, finishing his sentence.

"Then you won't let me —"

"It is my privilege," interrupted Darnell. "You would have to forego many pleasures and make some sacrifices to do this."

"But I'm willing," urged Miss Hadley, almost pleadingly.

There was so much of admiration in the look that Darnell gave her that she became embarrassed, and ceased to press the matter.

"I know you are," he returned, "but I can do this without inconveniencing any one, and I want to do it."

"It seems inexcusably bold," Miss Hadley began, still embarrassed, "to send for you to —"

"It was a favour to me," said Darnell.

"Then be quick!" cried Miss Hadley, excitedly. "You're wasting time."

There were indications that Darnell was on the point of forgetting his mission as a result of a desire to say something else to Miss Hadley. He had talked of Mason, but his eyes were speaking both of and to the girl. In fact, it was her generous and sensible action in the matter that most appealed to him at this moment. But her words roused him, and he hastened away.

"There never was such another in the history of the world," he said to himself.

Darnell went straight to his father's office, and told him what he wanted.

"That's not business," said the father.

"It's good enough business for me," returned the son. "I'll give you my note for it, secured by the iron and steel stock you gave me on my twenty-first birthday. I can raise the money on that stock anywhere, but I thought I'd come to you first."

"I suppose it's a political investment," suggested the father.

"It's to help an honest man, who is in a tight place because he is honest," answered the son, with feeling. "It's an investment in friendship."

"They don't pay dividends," laughed the father, but he reached for his check-book, just the same. "Keep your stock," he added. "I'll put this down as an advance to you, which will be deducted from your share of the estate later, if it's not paid back."

Darnell, senior, was very liberal in money matters, believing that, so long as a young man was not a spendthrift, he should be given considerable latitude, but after his son became twenty-one it had been understood that every advance made lessened his inheritance by that much. However, as Darnell, junior, was an only son, who was sure to get all in the course of time, this was little more than a pleasing fiction. Still, it was in the nature of doing business on business principles.

From his father's office Darnell went to the bank and then straight to Mason's store. Mason was seated in gloomy reflection at his desk in the back part of the store, waiting for formal notice of the expected suit. He knew little about the law, and had almost expected to find some one in charge of the place that morning.

"Who holds those notes?" demanded Darnell, for Miss Hadley had been unable to give him the name.

Mason looked up, startled. Then his eyes fell on some one behind Darnell, and he involuntarily clenched his fists.

Harkins had come in just after the young man, and was now advancing to the desk. Harkins did not like his task at all, and he was careful to see that his line of retreat was open; but the Old Man had insisted that he make one last formal demand for payment before bringing suit. Mason might change his mind, when he found ruin so close.

"There's the man," said Mason, pointing.

"I've come to make a last, formal demand for payment, Mr. Mason," said Harkins, still keeping at a respectful distance.

"Well, where are the notes?" broke in Darnell, sharply.

"I have them in my pocket," answered Harkins, bewildered and troubled by this unexpected development.

"Get them out. Mr. Mason is going to pay them."

"But — but —"

"Get them out, I tell you!" exclaimed Darnell. "They're going to be paid, if you can produce them."

"Paid!" repeated Mason, as if he did not fully comprehend.

"Yes, paid," said Darnell. "You haven't got the gumption of a cat, Mason." Darnell spoke with the sharpness of a man who is doing a favour and wants to be so cross that he won't be thanked for

it. "While you've been moping here," he went on, "I've negotiated a loan for you of one thousand dollars, payable when convenient. Here's a certified check for the amount, payable to my order, and indorsed over to you. I suppose you can take care of the interest due."

"Oh, Darnell!" faltered Mason, and the reaction was so great that tears glistened in his eyes.

"Shut up!" said Darnell, "and pay the notes."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MASTERFUL MAN

DARNELL knew that Miss Hadley would be anxious for a report on the result of his mission, and it was his intention to return to her at once; but on the way another idea occurred to him. In view of the conditions he knew to exist, it seemed little short of an inspiration.

"I'll stop for a moment to see Mr. Frazer, of Wilkinson, Frazer & Co.," he said to his chauffeur. As they had to pass through the business section of the city to get from one ward to the other, this was very little out of the way.

Mr. Frazer had Darnell admitted to his private office immediately. Wilkinson, Frazer & Co., formerly a partnership, had been reorganised as a stock company a few years before, and Darnell, senior, held some of the stock.

"Do you know Joseph Mason?" asked Darnell.

"The retail hardware man?" inquired Mr. Frazer.

"Yes."

"Well, we ought to. He owes us a little matter of about two thousand dollars on his stock."

"From a business point of view, what kind of a man is he?" asked Darnell.

Mr. Frazer leaned back in his chair and looked dreamily at the ceiling for a minute or two.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said, at last. "Mason knows the hardware business from the ground up. He is conscientious, persistent, and ordinarily thoroughly reliable. We have had dealings with him for a good many years, and we have given him a line of credit greater than we are in the habit of giving men of his limited resources. But he ought never to have gone into politics."

"I'm trying to get him out with a whole skin," said Darnell.

"We have been considerably worried about him lately," the merchant continued. "If it had been almost any one else, we would have been after him before this, but his past record is so good we have hesitated to make trouble. Still, our reports show that his business has been falling off and that he is in a bad way generally. Frankly, we have been lenient against our better judgment, hoping that he would take a grip on things and pull out. But the outlook isn't promising. I fear he has got in some political entanglements that are likely to hurt him."

"I can reassure you on that score," asserted Dar-

nell. "He is at this moment absolutely free and independent, so far as anything of that sort is concerned."

"You ought to know," returned Mr. Frazer. "Come to think of it, you ought to know more about him than we do."

"I do," said Darnell, "and I'm going to tell you what I know. It may be of value to both you and him."

When Darnell emerged from Mr. Frazer's office he was reasonably well satisfied, for he believed he had done a good stroke of business. While he had secured no absolute promise, he had learned that Mr. Frazer was disposed to be friendly to Mason, and at the very least would give him a fair chance to get out of his trouble.

"I will talk with Mr. Wilkinson about the matter," he had said. "If he agrees, we'll see what arrangements we can make. You may be sure that Mason is the kind of a man we would hate to see forced into failure. He made the mistake of neglecting what he does know thoroughly to attempt what he doesn't know at all, but my judgment of him is that he's well worth saving."

As Darnell continued his ride toward the Hadleys, somehow he thought more of the reception his news would receive from Miss Hadley than he did of the result to Mason. His admiration and enthusi-

asm had carried him almost to the point of proposing when he had seen her an hour or so before. "But she is said to be engaged," he muttered, and then he recalled the inflection with which Mason had repeated "Said to be" when this remark had been made to him. "There is circumstantial evidence," he added. "Fisher certainly had just left Hadley when he spoke of it, and yet — and yet — there should have been a formal announcement before this."

He found her anxiously waiting, and she was delighted with the information he brought.

"It's so good of you," she said.

"I wish I could truthfully say that I had done this solely for you," he returned, "but I can't. I would have done it as readily, if the news had come from some other source."

"Oh, I know it," she broke in, hastily. "If I hadn't known that, I wouldn't have dared send for you."

"You wouldn't have let me do a favour for you?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Oh, it isn't that, but — but —"

"But I have done something for you — at least at your suggestion," he insisted. "You have been the inspiration —"

"Oh, no," she interrupted, hastily; "you did it just because — because you are a man, a real man."

"You said 'almost a man' once," he suggested, with a trace of resentment.

"Well, 'almost a man,' then."

"What must I do to be a real man, a masterful man?" he asked; and suddenly it seemed to him as if he had his answer.

She had come to him from the conservatory, and he now noticed that she was toying with a rose — a deep-red rose. As he finished his question, and before she had time to answer, he reached out his hand to take it. They were standing near the entrance to the conservatory.

"No," she protested, weakly.

"I want it," he said; and she let him take it, but she did not look at him.

"I've seen just four roses of that peculiar shade," he said. "This is the fifth."

She did not mean to look up at him, but she could not help it. She knew her face was crimson, and she knew how he was looking at her before she raised her eyes. She also knew that, if his eyes met hers at that moment, a secret would be betrayed. But she looked up quickly, and then, without success, tried to look down again.

"Josephine," he said, softly.

"Don't," she pleaded.

"I will," he said, and he possessed himself of her

hand, although she made a pretence of trying to withhold it. "The rose was your courier, Josephine — a little in advance, but you'll follow it. You must follow it."

"You — you are hurting my hand," she protested, finally withdrawing her eyes.

"*My* hand," he corrected. "The rose is mine, all the roses are mine — I mean to have the bush that grows them. They have meant a lot to me, Josephine, and they would have meant more, if I had known the truth. I needed encouragement, but I was a fool to believe that Miss Dale —"

"You thought that?" she asked, quickly.

"I was told that."

"Then that was why —"

"Yes," he said, "that was **why**. To show my appreciation was a courtesy —"

"Only a courtesy?" she asked, roguishly. She had recovered something of her self-possession now, and she again looked up at him.

For answer he took her in his arms, almost roughly. Her eyes, her colour, and her smile had corroborated the story told by the rose.

"Mine!" he exclaimed, passionately, and for a rapturous moment his kisses forbade any attempt at verbal protest, if she had been disposed to make one.

"I haven't told you so," she finally managed to say, smiling up into his face.

"I don't need to be told; I know," he answered.

"And am I to be taken thus audaciously?" she pouted. "Am I not to be consulted at all, but just appropriated?"

"You like a masterful man," he laughed, "and I have consulted your eyes. Am I a real man now?"

"Very real," she said, and again there was an interval when she could say nothing.

A few minutes later they were in the conservatory, in front of the rose-bush that was her especial pride. She was leaning trustingly against his shoulder, and he — well, there was no danger of her falling.

"It was something Stanley Fisher said that first made me note the peculiar shade of the rose," he explained. "I should be grateful to him for that, but he was also the one who led me to think it came from Miss Dale, and — and — he may not have said that he was engaged to you, but he let that report get in circulation."

"Mr. Fisher adopted the Continental method of going to papa first," she said, slowly. "Papa liked him, and once, when I was piqued, I was tempted to — to — But I never let him get to the point of proposing," she added, hastily. "It's easy for a girl to ward that off — sometimes — when she's not dealing with a masterful man."

She looked up at him in such a way that —

But surely it is needless to go into further particulars. People who sought Darnell in either of his offices that afternoon failed to find him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ONE REWARD OF HONESTY

"Is it the fact that you have saved your friend, at least temporarily, that makes you so happy?" asked Darnell, senior, in the library that evening.

"To be honest," replied Darnell, junior, "I had almost forgotten there was such a man as Mason."

Darnell, senior, looked at his son with a quizzical smile.

"You and Mason have been pretty close friends," he remarked, "and there's only one thing I know of that can make a young man forget a friend in trouble."

The young man coloured under his father's gaze, and then laughed.

"You've guessed it," he said. "Now, can you guess her name?"

"Hadley?" suggested the father.

"Right," said the son. "I thought perhaps you'd guess Dale."

"No," answered the father. "Your relations with Miss Dale have been too uneventful. There's

sure to be a misunderstanding of some sort where the heart's engaged, just because the heart usurps the functions of the mind. If you don't encounter any rocks, you can be sure you're not travelling the pathway of love. It's too much trouble to be offended with some one whom you care nothing about."

"I never gave you credit for such wisdom as that," laughed the son.

"Oh, I know a little something besides stocks and bonds," retorted the father, good-naturedly. "But I'm proud of your choice, my boy. She's a good sensible girl. Have you seen Hadley yet?"

"No-o," answered the son, thoughtfully; "but I don't think he has any objection to me, except that I am an alderman. He thinks local politics contaminating and low."

"That's an objection that can be easily removed," commented the father, "and if he makes his consent conditional on your retirement from the Council at the end of this term, I'll be disposed to go around and shake hands with him."

"He might have insisted upon that at first, but, in view of my record, I don't think he will now," said the son. "Everybody concedes that I have been a clean, businesslike success. But what is it to you?"

"Well, you've been rather aggressively independent, I believe."

"Of course. You wouldn't have me otherwise, would you?"

"Not for the world; but I'll tell you a little story about a friend of mine to illustrate my position," explained the father. "This friend was a man of some property, and, at the urgent solicitation of many people who wanted a straightforward, businesslike administration of school affairs, he accepted an opportunity to become a member of the Board of Education. For a time all went well. Some reforms were secured, and there was no hint of jobbery. He is a man who is exceedingly earnest in all that he undertakes, and he gave a great deal of his time and attention to his duties. You see, as a matter of fact, only a man of independent means can afford to accept a good many of these positions, if he is going to be honest. Well, one day a little matter of a school site came up for consideration. It had been reported on by the proper committee, and some of the board members wanted to put it right through, but my friend balked. He happened to know a little something of real estate values in the vicinity of the chosen site.

" 'I can get you all the land you want there for just about half the price asked for this,' he said.

"They tried to argue him out of the stand he had taken, informing him confidentially that certain powerful politicians were anxious that this particular

site should be secured, but his dander was up, and he wouldn't listen to them.

" 'I'll bring in options on land in that vicinity that will show this deal up in its true colours,' he asserted.

" 'But it's policy,' others urged. 'From every point of view it's policy. We may find some of the school appropriation tied up next year, if we don't watch out.'

" However, he stuck to his point, and the price of that site suddenly tumbled. The Board paid more than its value for it, but not nearly so much as was originally asked."

" It was a splendid victory for your friend," exclaimed the son, " even if he didn't accomplish all that he wished."

" Yes, it was," admitted the father, " and the taxes on my friend's own property took a big jump at the very next assessment, and somehow he couldn't get them reduced, either."

" How was that possible? " asked the son.

" When you get into the intricacies of municipal politics," replied the father, " you've got me beyond my depth. I confess I don't know how these things are done, but that's what happened."

" How does that concern my position? " asked the son.

" It doesn't directly," answered the father; " but

I have reason to believe that I am paying for your independence and honesty."

"In taxes?"

"In taxes. I am assessed higher than others on similar property and higher than I ever have been before. Oh, it's worth the price in one sense, my boy, and I'd rather pay for the record you've made than have you make any other kind. That's why I have said nothing to you about it before. And if you want another term, go ahead and get it; but you might as well know something of the people you're dealing with."

"This may have no connection with me," suggested the son.

"That is possible," admitted the father. "I certainly can't prove the connection, although there is some circumstantial evidence of it. About the time you kicked over the traces an effort was made to convince me of the meritorious nature of the measures in question — without direct reference to you, of course — and, following that, I began to have trouble. I have had sidewalks condemned and new ones ordered, and have been harassed in innumerable ways, while, in many instances, owners of adjoining property are not molested. I am getting notices of one sort and another all the time, aside from unusually arbitrary treatment in assessment matters."

"Municipal politics," said the son, "is even dirtier than I thought. If they can't 'reach' a man one way, they'll get revenge in another. I believe I'll gratify Hadley by the information that I won't run again."

"Oh, they've given you up now," replied his father, "and they'll be giving their attention to other things shortly. These conditions never last long. Do as you please about it."

"I'll go back to the law exclusively," announced the young man, decisively. "I've had all the political experience I want."

"And I've paid for it," laughed his father.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A BETTER REWARD

WHEN Mason received a request to call on Mr. Frazer, of Wilkinson, Frazer & Co., he made up his mind that the end was in sight.

He had been half-expecting something of the sort. It had come to his ears that Bob Howe had made the threat, "We'll drive him out of the ward," and he was satisfied that Howe was speaking for the Old Man. This, however, was a mistake. When Harkins reported, the Old Man was disgruntled to think that Mason had escaped his clutches, and that, in consequence, it might be necessary to hold the gas measure back until there was a new Council, but the Old Man was not as vindictive as some of his lieutenants. He was merciless when seeking to gain a desired end; he would ruin a man, if he deemed it necessary for his purpose; he would betray him, if success lay in betrayal; but he seldom wasted his energies where nothing was to be gained. He decided that Mason should not go back to the Council. If it

were necessary to ruin him commercially in order to keep him out, the Old Man would not hesitate to do it, but Mason himself had relieved him of that necessity. There was no chance of Mason going back. So all the Old Man said was, "Damned obstinate fool!" and then began devising schemes for success instead of for revenge.

But Mason did not know this, and his experience with the "gang" led him to believe that there would be no hesitation in bringing exaggerated reports to the attention of Wilkinson, Frazer & Co. — and the truth was bad enough. So the summons disheartened him. He might succeed in securing a further extension of time, but he had to admit to himself that he could make no honest statement of existing conditions that would really warrant it.

Mr. Frazer's manner was not reassuring. In business matters he was a thorough business man, and he went at things with disconcerting directness.

"Mason," he said, "we have been hearing disquieting rumours about you, and we think we are entitled to know the exact truth. We have been generous to you in the matter of credit; we have been unusually lenient in the matter of collections — all this because of our implicit belief in your ability and your integrity. But we have reason to know that your business is not prospering."

"It is not," admitted Mason, despairingly.

“As a matter of business,” continued Mr. Frazer, “we would rather carry a good customer than close him out — there’s no money or trade in a bankrupt — but we first want to be sure that the good customer can pull through. We don’t want to stand by until some one else closes him out. Now, what’s the exact situation?”

Mason gazed gloomily out of the window for a moment or two before replying. He was tempted to surrender unconditionally, but he braced himself for one more effort. It is seldom that a man is in such desperate straits that he does not think he can win, if given a little consideration and help. The thing is to inspire another with the same confidence.

“Mr. Frazer,” he said, frankly but without much hope, “I honestly believe I can pull through, if I’m not pressed. I made a mistake in going into politics; it cost me a good deal in cash and a good deal more in trade. I know now that I was bled mercilessly at the beginning of the campaign; I was an easy mark, I suppose. At any rate, my political assessment was higher than that of others, and various ‘workers’ called upon me for additional expenses that were not warranted. In fact, I was simply held up by conscienceless political schemers, who pocketed the money — small sums, for the

most part, but considerable in the aggregate. You understand mine was a peculiar campaign."

Mr. Frazer nodded.

"Such a campaign would have been costly in any event, but my ignorance made it more expensive than it should have been, or than it would have been for another. And when I was abandoned by the regular organisation and forced to make an independent campaign with Darnell, it added materially to the cost. In fact, it put me pretty badly in debt. Then I didn't seem to be able to make myself popular as an alderman; I had sickness in my family; I had to neglect my business, and — well, Mr. Frazer, I am satisfied that there was a deliberate attempt made to drive away my trade. But, thank God! I'm free of the politicians now, and, with hard work and close attention to the store, I believe I can recover the ground lost, although it may be slow work."

"I will have to be the judge of that," returned the big merchant.

"I'll do my best, Mr. Frazer," Mason urged. "That store represents all I have in the world. If I fail there —" Mason concluded with a gesture of despair.

"You've told me something of how you got into trouble," said Mr. Frazer, "but you have not given me a statement of your present financial condition.

It's from that I must reach my decision. How much do you owe?"

"Something over four thousand dollars," answered Mason, feeling that this alone put an end to his hopes. "There is about two thousand dollars due you, on which you have already given me one extension of time. There is one thousand dollars due Darnell, which he advanced me to take up the notes I gave during the campaign; but," he added, hastily, "I am to have all the time I require on that. Then there is about one thousand dollars additional due on stock to other firms dealing in specialties that you don't handle, and a doctor's bill — my little girl's sickness has helped to put me in this plight — and some minor accounts that will perhaps run to one hundred or one hundred and fifty dollars."

Mr. Frazer shook his head dubiously.

"How much cash have you on hand?" he asked.

"Not much over one hundred dollars," answered Mason, dispiritedly. He was in that condition of mind when it took only a dubious shake of the head to depress him greatly. "I had to pay the interest on those notes for which Darnell advanced me the principal, you know."

"How much has your trade fallen off?"

"I'm afraid it's almost a third."

"You didn't make much more than a fair living before, did you?"

"No-o."

"Then, so far as the store is concerned, you're not making actual living expenses now."

"No." Mason spoke with more firmness now. He was sure the game was up, and his courage rose to meet the emergency. "I can readily understand how unconvincing this must seem to you, Mr. Frazer, and I don't blame you for taking the view that I know you take; but I feel sure I can pull through."

"Mason," said Mr. Frazer, "you can't do it in a thousand years. You have a wife and two children, and you're not making living expenses, aside from your salary as alderman, and that salary ends pretty soon now. While you're getting back to a living basis, if you ever can get back, you will be running steadily behind, and interest will be piling up on your indebtedness. The load is too heavy. You might hang on for awhile, but not for long."

Mason leaned his head on his hand, wearily. If he could not convince this creditor, there was no hope.

"You'll close me out?" he said, although he felt it was needless to ask the question.

"I'll buy you out."

"What!"

Mason sat suddenly bolt upright.

"I'll take your stock at its cash wholesale value, deduct the sum due us, pay you the balance, which will enable you to take care of all your outstanding indebtedness and still leave you a margin, if my reports as to the value of the stock you carry are accurate, and then —"

"And then I will be out of business," broke in Mason. "It's a generous offer, and I suppose I'll have to accept it, but — but I'll have nothing to do. I'll have to begin over again."

"Precisely," asserted Mr. Frazer. "And when I find a capable and reliable man, who knows the hardware business as you know it, why — I hire him, Mason."

"You hire him," repeated Mason, as if he did not quite understand.

"I do, if I can get him. Men of that kind are not so easy to find that I am disposed to let one get away from me. I happen to have a vacancy here, Mason. It is a fairly good position as assistant manager of one of the departments, and it pays three thousand dollars a year, with a good prospect of advancement for the right man. I've been looking for some one who had the knowledge of detail and the general experience to fill it acceptably. Does the offer strike you as a fair one?"

"Fair!" repeated Mason. "Why, Mr. Frazer,

I never made more than two thousand dollars a year out of the store, and not often that much."

"That only shows that you are worth more to us than you are to yourself."

"Do you want me to resign from the Council?" asked Mason.

"No; finish your term, but don't go back."

"I can't go back," laughed Mason.

"That's a good thing for you," said Mr. Frazer. "Politics — especially local politics — means a sacrifice to the business man, but you've made your sacrifice; and I won't say you haven't done some good, either — all that is possible under existing conditions. Let some one else try his hand at it now."

Mason tried to thank him, but Mr. Frazer cut him short.

"This is a business proposition," he said. "I know you — it's my duty to be posted on all of our credit customers — and I am offering you no more than I think you are worth. I expect you to earn the money. Now go back, close up, and have things in shape to go over your stock with a man I'll send to you to-morrow morning. Good day!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“CLOSED”

MAMIE, convalescent, was sitting in a big chair, looking out of the window, when her father entered.

“Oh, look at papa smile!” she cried.

“Why, Joe,” exclaimed his wife, “I haven’t seen that smile on your face for months and months. Did they give you an extension of time?”

“Better than that,” he answered, in his joyous enthusiasm embracing and kissing his wife until she was constrained to mildly protest. “They’ve bought my stock and offered me a position at three thousand dollars a year.”

“Three thousand dollars a year! Oh, Joe!”

“And you can pay the doctor and Mr. Darnell and — and everybody else, and have three thousand dollars a year sure!”

“I can pay everybody every cent I owe, and have a margin left before I even begin to draw the salary.”

The little woman disengaged herself, sank down on the sofa and buried her face in the sofa-pillow.

“ What in the world are you crying about ? ” he asked.

“ Go 'way ! go 'way ! ” she pleaded. “ I can't help it — it's such a relief — but I'll be all right in a minute. Go 'way, please ! ”

But he didn't. He sat down beside her, drew her to him, and pretty soon she looked up from his shoulder, smiling.

“ It was so unexpected, ” she explained. “ But are you sure there's no mistake, Joe ? ”

“ If you think there is, ” he returned, “ just take a walk past the store this evening, and you'll be convinced. ”

She accepted his assurance without further evidence, but there were others who walked by the store and wondered and gossiped, and the comments ran like this :

“ Well, they killed him. ”

“ I knew they would. ”

“ He was no good to us, anyway. Baxter did better. ”

“ But he was all right before he got into politics. I'm sort of sorry. ”

“ Yes, but over here an alderman has got to look out for his ward. The silk-stockings idea won't do. ”

“ They say he made a good thing out of it, anyway. ”

"Is that so?"

"Yes; he's to get ten thousand dollars a year from Wilkinson, Frazer & Co."

"I wonder what he did for them in the Council."

"I'm glad he isn't busted, anyhow, just for old times. He was a good man once. I used to like him."

The news spread to political headquarters, but all the Old Man said was, "Drop him! He's not for us! We lost him when we lost the notes, and he's clear beyond reach now. Some fools do have wonderful luck."

Casey, when he heard of it, yelled, "Hurroo! I like to see a nervy felly win ag'in' odds, although, iv coorse, I have nothin' ag'in' you or ye-er boss, Ryan."

And all this was occasioned by the rumours that followed the posting of the following sign on the door of Mason's hardware store:

CLOSED.

L. C. Page and Company's Announcement List of New Fiction

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